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Public Service Media in the “networked” era: A comparison of remit, funding, and debates in 17 western Countries

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ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-159817>

Book Section

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Originally published at:

Schweizer, Corinne; Puppis, Manuel (2018). Public Service Media in the “networked” era: A comparison of remit, funding, and debates in 17 western Countries. In: Lowe, Gregory; van den Bulck, Hilde; Donders, Karen. Public Service Media in the Networked Society. Göteborg: Nordicom, 109-124.

PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA IN THE NETWORKED SOCIETY

RIPE *@* 2017

Gregory Ferrell Lowe, Hilde Van den Bulck & Karen Donders (eds.)

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NORDICOM

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individual contributors; Nordicom 2018

978-91-87957-73-4 (print)

978-91-87957-74-1 (pdf)

The publication is also available as open access at www.nordicom.gu.se

Published by:
Nordicom
University of Gothenburg
Box 713
SE 405 30 GÖTEBORG
Sweden

Cover by: Per Nilsson

Cover photo: Erika Stenlund / Bildhuset / TT

Printed by: Stema Specialtryck AB, Borås, Sweden, 2018



Contents

Preface	7
<i>Hilde Van den Bulck, Karen Donders & Gregory Ferrell Lowe</i> Public Service Media in the Networked Society. What Society? What Network? What Role?	11
SECTION I. CONCEPTS AND CRITIQUES	
<i>Peter Goodwin</i> An Impossible Challenge for Public Service Media? The Intellectual Context of the Networked Society	29
<i>Graham Murdock</i> Reclaiming Digital Space From Commercial Enclosure to the Broadcast Commons	43
<i>Stig Hjarvard</i> Public Service in the Age of Social Network Media	59
<i>Hermann Rotermund</i> Digital Media Culture and Public Service Media in the Platform Era	75
<i>Jannick Kirk Sørensen & Jonathon Hutchinson</i> Algorithms and Public Service Media	91
SECTION II. POLICY, STRUCTURES AND GOVERNANCE	
<i>Corinne Schweizer & Manuel Puppis</i> Public Service Media in the 'Network' Era A Comparison of Remits, Funding, and Debate in 17 Countries	109
<i>Davor Marko</i> The Feasibility of a Public Service Orientation in the Western Balkans Complications for a 'Networked Society' in an Illiberal Context	125
<i>Mercedes Muñoz Saldaña & Ana Azurmendi Adarraga</i> Public Service Media and Multilevel Governance Citizen Participation in the Networked Society – the Spanish Case	143

<i>Ruth McElroy & Caitriona Noonan</i> Public Service Media and Digital Innovation The Small Nation Experience	159
<i>Dirk Wauters & Tim Raats</i> Public Service Media and Ecosystem Sustainability Towards Effective Partnerships in Small Media Markets	175
SECTION III. AUDIENCES, DISTRIBUTION AND SERVICE CHALLENGES	
<i>Maria Michalis</i> Distribution Dilemmas for Public Service Media Evidence from the BBC	195
<i>Gisela Reiter, Nicole Gonser, Markus Grammel & Johann Gründl</i> A Case Study in Austria Young Audiences and their Valuation of Public Service Media	211
<i>Christine Horz</i> Networking Citizens Public Service Media and Audience Activism in Europe	227
<i>Alexander Dhoest & Marleen te Walvaart</i> Convergence and Participation in Children's Television The Case of Flemish Public Service Television	245
Authors	259

Preface

This is the eighth RIPE Reader in the series published by Nordicom since 2003. The collection brings to fruition the proceedings and discourse in the RIPE@2016 conference that was sponsored by Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroeporganisatie (VRT) – the public service media organisation for Flanders, Belgium – in collaboration with two European research universities that are important in the field of public service media: The University of Antwerp and the Free University Brussels. The theme of the 2016 conference is captured in the book title, *Public Service Media in the Networked Society*. This theme was decided by the senior management of VRT and proved to be very timely, having great relevance for the future of public service media (PSM) in a global media environment that increasingly prioritises networked communications.

In Europe especially, PSM is mainly provided by legacy public service broadcasting organisations that were operated as monopolies for decades. The public service orientation is a defining feature of the heritage and landscape of media in Europe. Since the mid-1990s, a paradigm shift has been underway that is driven by advancing digitalisation, growth in competition from powerful global conglomerates, fragmentation of audiences and growing emphasis on consumerism and commercial interests. The transformation of public service broadcasting (PSB) into public service media (PSM) is a significant aspect of this paradigm shift because public sector media have played a leading role in establishing online services and developing new media platforms in Europe. Their investments and efforts have not always been rewarded. On the contrary, in recent years the commercial media industry has been pushing back aggressively. The stakes matter for every citizen in contemporary democracy because the future of relations between media and society depend on the roles, functions and orientation of media, which have decisive importance in the development of a network(ed) society. This book is about that.

The RIPE@2017 Reader is a valuable addition to a series that provides the most comprehensive treatment of developmental issues, defining challenges, and key trends affecting the conceptualisation, organisation, remits and practices of PSM in the twenty-first century. Over 18 years of cumulative results, the series of RIPE Readers

has become a primary source for analysis, insight and critical discourse in this field internationally. This series chronicles the ongoing development and disruption of the public service enterprise in media. Since the 2007 Reader, edited by Lowe and Jo Bardoel, advances in digitalisation and networked communications have been a focal interest, and thus we've been exploring the networked society framework. The RIPE@2017 Reader offers a pointed critical analysis of this concept and its social and operational implications for the public interest in media today. As editors, we are pleased with the quality of each and every contribution comprising this collection, and feel confident this eighth Reader meets the high standards of scholarship our community of academics and practitioners have come to expect from RIPE.

There are many organisations and individuals deserving of thanks. We begin with our colleagues at VRT and in the two universities who organised and hosted RIPE@2016. This required an enormous amount of work and considerable investment. On behalf of the participants, as well, our thanks for a memorable experience in both the depth and breadth of intellectual substance and the special enjoyment of the hospitality. It was another great 'RIPE Experience' on par with earlier conferences around the world. On behalf of the two universities, we are especially grateful for the invaluable contributions of Tim Raats who carried much of the load during the run-up to the conference when Hilde was in New York City and Karen was on maternity leave. We also thank three colleagues in particular who managed the project for VRT: Luc Rademakers, Veronique Rombouts, and Tomas Coppens.

The Conference Planning Group deserve rich thanks for their tireless efforts to ensure a successful result. We sincerely thank each of the members: Monica Herrero Subias at the University of Navarra in Spain (the forthcoming host for the RIPE@2018 conference), Hallvard Moe at the University of Bergen in Norway, Steve Paulussen at the University of Antwerp, Manuel Puppis at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, Phillip Savage at McMaster University in Canada, and Bouziane Zaid at Al Akhawayn University in Morocco. We also thank the many colleagues and long-term RIPE community members who devoted their time and provided expertise in reviewing paper abstracts, suggesting ideas for developing the conference programme, and serving as panel moderators and workgroup Chairs and Deputy Chairs. We want to especially acknowledge two colleagues who proposed, organised and managed the first RIPE pre-conference event that brought together senior scholars in PSM with early career researchers – Jonathon Hutchinson at the University of Sydney, and Chris Wilson at RMIT University in Melbourne. They produced the ECR@RIPE event and it was a fruitful experience for everyone. On their behalf and for ourselves as well, much thanks to Minna Aslama Horowitz who helped prepare for the event and has made valuable contributions in building the Global PSM Experts Network, which supported the pre-conference.

We deeply appreciate our authors who have contributed quality research and thoughtful analyses to this collection. Thanks to each and all for your patience and for all the hard work necessary to fulfil the high standards of proper scholarship. The

PREFACE

chapters were subjected to a rigorous peer-review process, and on the behalf of our authors and ourselves, we thank the many colleagues who helped with the peer review process. We trust our authors will agree that all of the effort has produced an excellent result that we hope every author will be proud of and pleased with.

Finally, we thank Nordicom for publishing and promoting the RIPE Reader series, and especially this book. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Ingela Wadbring who left Nordicom at the start of 2018 to pursue new opportunities. We wish her all the very best. She took the decision to open the entire series as free downloads in electronic form, which ensures this rich resource is available to researchers and educators all around the world. If you have not already, please visit the Nordicom website to download any Reader that might be missing from your personal library. In the current period of transition to a new leadership team, we wish the Board and our colleagues at Nordicom great continuing success.

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Public Service Media in the Networked Society

What Society? What Network? What Role?

Hilde Van den Bulck, Karen Donders
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Abstract

The 'networked society' has become a popular idea in national media policy and corporate strategy, including for public service media at national and European levels. It is equally notable in academic discourse about changing media-society relations as the emerging media structure of the twenty-first century de-emphasises mass media and prioritises networked communications. This transformation is generally considered to be important and urgent, but also rather vague and fraught with hype that is typical for buzzwords and catch phrases. This chapter provides a context for the collection that comprises this book. We clarify and critique the networked society notion with specific focus on the role and place of public service media. Our contribution situates the public service orientation in media historically in order to demonstrate contradictions and challenges involved with development of the enterprise in the networked society framework and context.

Keywords: networked communications, media markets, globalization, buzzwords, public service broadcasting, macro theory

Introduction

The emerging media structure of the twenty-first century de-emphasises mass media and prioritises networked communications. The facilitators especially include Google, Facebook and Twitter, which have a leading role globally. Networked media are fundamental to the development of 'networked society', as suggested by Manuel Castells (1996), with important economic ramifications as elaborated by Yochai Benkler (2006). The role and place of public service media in the emerging structure is uncertain and an issue of central importance for the character and affordances offered to all citizens (or not) in a networked society. The uncertainties are linked with three factors of fundamental importance (see the chapter by Peter Goodwin for insight):

1. PSM is rooted in the broadcasting heritage of PSB and steeped in a mass media mentality.

2. PSM is tightly focused on domestic media services and lacks opportunity and (often) the inclination to 'go global'.
3. Push-back from commercial media against PSM development online is already strong and increasingly influential.

There is a great need for critical reflection and careful thought because the validity of a public service orientation in tomorrow's media systems is at issue.

We are talking about the evolution of media, but not only that and not mainly. Of greatest importance are the roles and functions of media as understood in the networked society concept, that "depicts and promotes a vision of a society that is thoroughly interwoven with information and communication infrastructures, which (re-)shape the practices and structures that constitute all facets of social life" (vom Brocke et al. 2016: 159). Operationalising the concept depends on the digitisation of media, which is characterised by audience interaction as users, rather than merely as receivers, and with growing fragmentation due to media abundance. The networked society is paradoxical in that people are both more connected and unconnected at the same time, but there is growing risk of a new period of centralisation that could be facilitated by ending the policy of net neutrality (Wu 2010).

The focal idea (and ideal) of a networked society hinges on multidimensional interconnectedness: of technologies, economies, media industries and companies, and, above all, communities. The latter is especially complex because the interconnectivity is partly geographic (towns and nations) and largely sociocultural, given diverse communities of interest that transcend traditional boundaries. Interconnectivity depends on a sophisticated but opaque international configuration of networks – a network of networks that furnishes the infrastructure of a networked society in practice.

Contemporary media markets are in a disrupted state due to high uncertainty and volatility in market structures and modes of communication. The project of Modernity in the twentieth century emphasised the importance of mass media institutions (Van den Bulck 2001) and PSM is rooted in that heritage. The transition from PSB to PSM is a transformational project because it is not simply a change in services or options for service, but in orientation and identity. This has been the defining focus of strategic development in public media institutions since the late 1990s, especially in Europe, and the core concern of pertinent scholarship.

At issue is not simply what happens to broadcasting and how online services develop. The issue is fundamentally institutional in both of the ways that term is used (see Lowe 2010). Will PSM organisations as institutions have continuing importance as a primary node in a network of media organisations of many kinds for citizens in each country? This concern was treated by Graham Murdock (2005) who focused on PSM and 'the digital commons'. His thesis is updated and further developed in his contribution in this volume. For Murdock, a small group of global 'digital majors' are creating a virtual oligopoly of internet control that has worrisome implications for the future of diverse public cultures and the information needs of democracy in practice.

This underscores the importance of the second way the term is used – the institution as a cultural norm that is fundamental to a way of life. To the extent that equitable development of networked media systems matters, it is vital to extend and redevelop a public service orientation in media.

Our interest is not merely about organisations as such. To an important degree, the notion of a central organisation for PSM contradicts the networked society framework, which is characterised by media abundance, hyper-connectivity and anticipated decline in market failure. In that light, the fullest degree of public interest needs in a networked society are arguably best served by de-centralising public service functions across a range of media and other organisations and initiatives (Donders & Raats 2015). On the other hand, it remains entirely unclear how to *guarantee* provision of vital public services in media without a mandated and accountable institutional provider. If media are solely commercial in orientation, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to guarantee this. That point is crucial in the chapter by Dirk Wauters and Tim Raats, who argue that PSM organisations should be a hub for facilitating collaborative partnerships that are essential to the sustainability of public services in networked media ‘ecologies’.

In a sense, then, we have two contending perspectives. These are variously treated by our contributors. Corinne Schweizer and Manuel Puppis provide a robust comparative assessment of the state of play across 17 European countries. They do not take a position on either perspective, but this research provides a nuanced view that is empirically grounded of PSM in a networked society. Given the contrary views and diverse realities entailed by the concept and practice, our authors adopt a critical stance. In our collective estimation, the ‘networked society’ notion has merit but has become an overworked catch phrase and buzzword. As Mjøs, Moe and Sundet (2014) noted, buzzwords originate in a particular field but are quickly adopted as a popular reference for a phenomenon that is broadly important and yet increasingly imprecise. The historic roots of the networked society concept can be traced to scholarship on information and communication technologies (ICT) that have long been characterised by optimistic expectations of an ‘information age’ in ‘post-industrial societies’ (see Bell 1973). This vision was embraced in the 1990s when national policies began to describe the internet as an ‘information superhighway’.

In becoming a buzzword, a term takes on new connotations. Although less precise, the significance is often imbued with a greater sense of urgency (Mjøs, Moe & Sundet 2014). The networked society notion is an influential catch phrase for legitimating media policy changes and industry investment in forms of ‘participatory’ media. In Europe, this focus in media policy was prioritised in 2015 as an imperative for developing a “digital single market” (European Commission u.d.). The networked society is expected to greatly benefit individuals as citizens and spur robust economic development. There is little empirical evidence that the former is true, and the latter has mainly benefitted the handful of global digital majors reaping enormous financial profits due to big data proprietorship.

PSM is equally vulnerable to the use of buzzwords (see Donders et al. 2012; Moe & Van den Bulck 2014). In recent years, the ‘networked society’ has become a notable feature of PSM corporate strategies and policy documents at national and European levels, to a degree that it is now of considerable importance in legislation and academic analyses alike (see Glowacki & Jaskiernia 2017). A 2014 policy brief from the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) titled *Vision 2020* specifically endorses “connecting to a networked society” for “continuous improvement of trust and return on society” in PSM. We are clearly dealing with something that is very important, but quite vague. The networked society notion, and the role and place of PSM in that, merits critical examination of several essential questions this book attempts to answer:

- What is the networked society?
- How real is a networked society in both established and emerging media economies?
- How does a networked society affect PSM’s heritage roles and functions, and what might it portend in new requirements?
- What indications are there that a networked society either expands or lessens the position of PSM as an institution?
- How practical is it to think of PSM as a central hub for public services in media, i.e. as an important but no longer exclusive (if it ever was) node for this via decentralised networks?
- Is market failure in the provision of mediated public goods still valid, or will this be largely solved by alternative provision via grassroots initiatives and in distributed forms?

Answering these questions is not only important for the future of PSM organisations, but importantly for the future of democratic development in twenty-first century societies.

In this chapter, we begin with an examination of the networked society as a context for contemporary debate about the role of PSM today. We critically evaluate the promise and reality of the networked society as the basis for positing a range of key questions regarding the potential of PSM in the emerging media structure for society. We connect our discussion with contributions that comprise this collection.

What is a ‘networked society’?

Manuel Castells proposed the network society concept in the late 1990s to explain how new information and communication technologies facilitate the restructuring of capitalist economies (1996, 2000, 2004). His perspective is treated by several authors and in useful detail by Peter Goodwin. Castells’ perspective was adopted by influential

media scholars. Denis McQuail (2007) considered the thesis a useful macro theory for understanding the next historical step in the evolution of media-society relations. In his view, this is sequential to three earlier stages as suggested by Marshall McLuhan (1962): Oral Communication, the Gutenberg Galaxy (print) and the Global Village (broadcasting). McQuail (2007) believed Castells' ideas are important for understanding what is new about the 'fourth phase'.

Castells was not especially interested in media, but rather in a new type of societal organisation in which social structures are increasingly de-centralised, non-hierarchical and comprised of complex networks. The importance of media is central, however, as he explained (1996: 34):

A network society is a society where the key social structures and activities are organized around electronically processed information networks. So, it's not just about networks or social networks, because social networks have been very old forms of social organization; it's about social networks which process and manage information and are using micro-electronic based technologies.

This aligns with Arjun Appadurai's multi-dimensional view of globalisation that was published the same year, which resists the cultural imperialism thesis and proposes a complex assortment of semi-overlapping, semi-autonomous 'scapes' (1996) that co-determine the globalisation process. Globalisation is an underlying dynamic that drives development of dispersed but connected networks across national boundaries. This is a focus of the chapter by Hermann Rotermund.

Castells understands networks as an instrumental feature of every sphere in contemporary society, not merely as technological infrastructure. The ubiquity of networks in politics, economics and cultures account for the rise of a networked society. This is not to underestimate the vital role of digital communications technology or information production and processing. It is to say that a networked society as such is not that primarily because of media but because of social arrangements and dynamics that involve media. This points to the importance of mediatization, treated in the chapter by Stig Hjarvard as "a holistic perspective on the interdependencies between media and wider culture and societal conditions" that "shifts attention from communicative processes of 'mediation' (the use of various media for communication) to social processes of 'mediatization' (changes brought about in wider culture and society due to the growing presence and importance of media)."

Although elevating the social over the technical, Castells put digital media and communication technologies firmly at the intersection. The networked society is a complex communications network, described by Monge and Contractor (2003: 39) as a "pattern of contact [...] created by flows of messages among communicators". This can be understood as a system of links and hubs that connect networks and facilitate their interaction in an endless flow of information, capital and culture exchange.

In our view, the Networked Society is an *internetified* phenomenon. Drawing on Dutton's (2008) idea, this kind of society is a meta-network comprised of networks

of networks. Individuals and societies are dealing with a complex constellation of networks that are not very transparent or accountable, but the internet is where the net *works*. Public networks, commercial networks, oppositional networks, gated networks, and dark networks are linked in varying degrees of openness, closedness and hiddenness with political networks, activist networks, cultural networks, corporate networks and social networks. Networks function online and offline, in real time and virtual time, and do so within, across and outside every kind of boundary.

Benkler sees these developments in socio-economic terms, in the light of globalisation and the restructuring of capitalism as argued by Castells. In Benkler's view, a networked information economy primarily benefits *individuals* who he presumes to be generally critical of commercial mass media for limiting participation and creating bottlenecks that benefit wealthy oligopolies. Benkler celebrates non-institutional development, described as an "innovative ecosystem made of public funding, traditional non-profits, and the newly emerging sector of peer production" (2006: 15). His primary focus is non-market players and, to a lesser but significant degree, non-state actors. He emphasises this development as a fierce, high-stakes "clash between incumbent institutions and emerging social practices" (ibid: 56), i.e. between the vested interests of mass media firms and non-institutional forms of mediation. Benkler is deeply interested in the implications of this shift for developing the public sphere – which has particular relevance to the development of PSM as such. It is unclear how much of his prioritisation will be proven true in the long run, but he is certainly right in noting the central importance of an economic focus in networked media development.

In a globalised networked society, time is timeless, at once becoming more complicated and simpler than earlier understood, shrinking and becoming more dispersed. Digital media networks are not bound to a particular space, but characterised by a "space of flows" – as Castells wrote.¹ The 'position' of an individual or organisation is determined by their location in the network information flows, rather than a physical location. The networked society is inextricably contextualised by media as a globalised 'scape' (Appadurai 1996). Key nodes in the networked society are therefore largely outside the control of national legislation or regulation.²

PSM organisations are inescapably meshed in these trends, pushed by and struggling with the same issues that shape, affect and complicate a comprehensive environment in which media-society relations are practiced. This environment is unstable, unpredictable and, for now, still unknowable. The key question regarding the role of PSM has great significance for understanding the potential of services for publics in the future.

What place for public service media in a networked society?

Benkler (2006) conceives the transition to a digital media environment as a shift from the mass media era of an industrial information economy to a networked informa-

tion economy. As (mostly) national institutions, public service broadcasting (PSB) was characterised by the aims and features of Modernity which prioritised the utility of mass media (see Hall 1992; Scannell 1996). Although frequently lumped together as 'European' PSB or PSM, there are significant national differences. The historic 'heartland' of the classical approach is North-West Europe (Lowe & Steemers 2012) with great similarities in structures, regulations, mission and operations. How PSB was understood and operationalised there has been broadly influential elsewhere.

In this region, public service provision in broadcasting was organised in centralised institutions with strong government support and structured as national broadcasting monopolies. This structure was legitimated on the premise of spectrum scarcity and to guarantee universal coverage. Funding was acquired via licence fees on receiving devices, with outright bans or strict limitations on advertising. PSB organisations were mandated to inform, educate and entertain the Public (with a capital P in the twentieth century era of High Modernity), targeting a broad general audience. Over time, they were also expected to satisfy various minority interests (Horsti & Hultén 2011).

The nation was the PSB 'universe' and the exercise of citizenship was the focal interest. PSB was expected to cultivate enlightenment and grow cultural capital, and to strengthen a collective identity among all citizens of the nation-state (Van den Bulck 2001; Price & Raboy 2003). PSB was expected to provide high quality content and to embody the highest professional standards. This orientation was paternalistic, but with good social intentions (Van den Bulck 2001). And PSM was accountable to government through oversight bodies appointed by parliaments, which the late Karol Jakubowicz (2003: 148) described as a configuration of "broadcasters, politicians, intellectual and cultural elite". Construed as a project to maximise political empowerment, PSB was supposed to be deeply committed to citizen emancipation (Murdock 2005).

However well or poorly this orientation was performed in practice, since the introduction of commercial broadcasting in the mid-1980s PSB has been in a near constant state of flux at the confluence of social developments in technological, economic, political and cultural environments. The transformation to PSM has been embattled with challenges for funding, recognition of goals, deciding the proper framework for remits and, ultimately, for social and political legitimacy in a media environment that has become increasingly commercialised and digitalised (Doyle 2006). PSM accountability still follows 'upward lines' (Jakubowicz, 2003), but the organisations are accountable primarily to national authority although multilevel governance has become a pressing issue in the EU. The challenges and dynamics are insightfully treated in the chapter by Mercedes Muñoz Saldaña and Ana Azurmendi Adarraga. Many politicians seem not to understand that most commercial media companies are owned and operated on a global scale by a handful of wealthy conglomerates (Lawson-Borders 2006; d'Haenens & Saey 2007; Donders & Raats 2012).

In the context of networked communications, public service provision is less limited to and constrained by institutionalised structures, which nonetheless continue

to have reasonably high degrees of influence. But the rapid growth and widespread popularity of social networked media is an essential feature of mediatization, as Hjarvard discusses. As noted, Benkler (2006) is keen on the potential of non-market, non-state players to grow participation. The latter increasingly features the mediated practices of social activists, as treated in the chapter by Christina Horz in her perspective on 'PSM challengers'. While significant challengers are located in institutional(ised) structures (commercial and non-commercial, both), it is important to recognise the rise of self-organising activists who use networked media to pursue socio-political goals that are typically grounded in a human rights perspective and reflect a public service ethos. Non-institutionalised forms of public service provision are a feature of networked societies that depend for their functional performance on networked media of communications. For many of these activists, PSM is part of the problem they are struggling against, rather than an ally or compatriot.

PSM organisations are struggling to remain meaningful and relevant, and to recreate a viable place in the flux of convergence dynamics that mitigate against their centrality. That is why they must engage with a complex assortment of stakeholders in governments, among competitors and with users in relations that are sometimes competitive and sometimes co-operative. It is why they grapple with requirements for high accountability and the need for ample affordances (Van den Bulck 2015) without sacrificing the independence that is necessary to serve civil society rather than state or market interests. It is why they must continuously reinvent the substance and parameters of their remit to address persistent claims of market distortion with new development (Van den Bulck & Donders 2014). Meeting these challenges is difficult because PSM organisations must do more without additional resources, accommodate increasingly dispersed, active and varied users, and achieve a high degree of reach in an environment that makes this problematic. The chapter by Maria Michalis provides a fruitful overview about this in her treatment of distribution dilemmas.

The legacy values of PSB are especially uncertain for younger media users (Just, Büchi & Latzer 2017). While young people often support the ideal of public service in media, many do not find PSM channels or content of personal interest and value. The challenge of serving a generation that uses media quite differently from their elders and is not as tightly connected to PSM provides the focus of the contribution by Gisela Reiter, Nicole Gonser, Markus Grammel and Johann Gründl. They present findings from a large-scale study in Austria that indicates the potential value of PSM for young people, but also worrisome indications that young people think these organisations are too focused on self-interested political and economic concerns.

The framework and dynamics of an increasingly networked society are not especially friendly to PSM. The new media structure can more easily bypass traditional institutions and weaken their historical roles. Far from being a central 'hub' in the new environment, PSM may become at best just another node in a decentralised and globalised networked media system. At worst, developments may render these organisations obsolete. The networked society construct de-emphasises core values

in the legacy system, rendering them less appealing or even doable than often hoped. PSM roles and functions face significant challenges in being taken on by other agents, in a decentralised, networked media system that is largely commercial and highly competitive, and at a scale that dwarfs most national contexts – especially in Europe. The chapter by Ruth McElroy and Caitriona Noonan focuses on this problem in applying a small-nation perspective to the challenges for public service media in a global media environment.

We next interrogate the buzz surrounding the networked society notion as the basis for questioning both the veracity of the presumed magnitude of this phenomenon, and the euphoria that permeates it. That is important for grounding the critical contributions in this book that have a bearing on media policy and corporate strategy alike.

Beyond the buzz

Like other grand narratives about the relationship between media and society, the theory of a networked society is compelling because it encourages wonder and excitement about something new that presumably signals dramatic changes for the better. Although an abstract notion, this narrative feels valid due to personal experiences in social media, online shopping, mobile media and WiFi networks. But the theory of an all-encompassing networked society merits critical scrutiny because the construct is becoming dominant in policy discourse and serves to legitimate industry investment. Figuring out what is true and what is hype matters to the theoretical value of the construct and for its practical application.

We do not set out to undermine the contributions of Castells and Benkler, or others (e.g., Negroponte 1996; Shirkey 2008; Jenkins 2009). Neither do we entertain an ambition to provide a definite evaluation. Rather, we want to critically assess the ways in which the networked society construct has taken on a life of its own that functions as a catch phrase and buzzword also in PSM research. Critics of Castells' ideas typically focus on his analysis of the role of information in contemporary society and assumptions about governing dynamics in relations between labour and capitalism in the 'information age' (see Garnham 2004; Weber 2004). We focus on a critique of the notion in connection with the position of PSM in contemporary media systems.

As a macro theory, the networked society construct is useful. But it tends to over-generalise what is happening in some places and overlook others. What is happening is to different degrees at different speeds. This first criticism is about the 'grand' nature of the narrative, which assumes a total and irrevocable change is happening everywhere at once. In fact, media-society relations are evolutionary and unfold in ways that are incremental, dispersed and uneven. The chapter by Davor Marko provides a timely illustration of PSM in the Western Balkan countries. In fact, online media hubs and nodes have not replaced the media structures and markets of the mass media anywhere, nor done as much as often presumed to upend broadcasting structure.

Garnham (2004) understands the network society as a further development of (late) industrial society rather than a radically new society. Castells made that point, too, although it has been neglected. In developing a more insightful understanding, it is useful to underscore the economic basis of a 'networked economy' or 'economy of networks' (see Rifkin 2000; Anderson 2006; Benkler 2006). This view provides an evolutionary perspective that encourages analyses from a long-term perspective to explore changes in relation to continuities. While the networked society adds an important layer of media affordance and performance, legacy media structures and agents remain highly relevant for most people in everyday practice everywhere.

Taking an evolutionary perspective encourages questioning the extent to which the networked society is in fact a global phenomenon. From an economic perspective, this matters to the vested interests of media and telecom corporations in the developed world even more than elsewhere. It is also unclear regarding the extent to which the network society is manifest in a similar manner in all types of societies, even where it has traction – in liberal, authoritarian and competitive authoritarian media systems. Further, it is uncertain if this alters fundamental characteristics of media systems as categorised in the influential work of Dan Hallin and Paolo Mancini (2004) and others (e.g., Levitsky & Way 2010). Significant differences clearly remain when one examines the orientations and organisation of diverse societies even within Europe, much less beyond. These patterns persist however much or little they are networked through media. In short, there are serious problems with the presumed scope of application for this grand narrative, and the scale of broader changes that networked media are assumed to cause.

A second criticism hinges on the popular use of the networked society that emphasises something entirely new and quite unprecedented. In fact, all societies in every age have been networked and stratified (both) in various forms and ways: by tribal affiliations, by guilds, by class, by markets, by extended family networks, by 'secret societies,' and by the routine needs of the governed and the governing in processes to work out on-going relations. Media organisations, too, have long been networked, as evident in historic printing guilds and contemporary journalist unions, news agency wire services (e.g., the Associated Press and United Press International), affiliate structures (in the American broadcasting system), and in persistent tendencies to form oligopolies and practice collusion in media industries (Wu 2010).

PSM institutions have been networked for decades too, as evident in lobbying by the EBU and building programme exchanges such as Eurovision (EBU 2004; Van Rompuy & Donders 2013). To be fair, Castells (2000) later recognised that networks are nothing new as forms of social organisation. What mattered to him was the shift to networks as the centre of *all* social practices, which although dispersed comprise a centralised system of interconnected nodes that include traditional mass media institutions. In Europe, which wasn't a focus of his analysis, this certainly pertains to PSM.

Legacy mass media, including PSM, continue to enjoy a pronounced presence in online network architecture. While platform providers and programmers are power-

ful intermediaries, PSM institutions are more trusted and often the preferred sources for a variety of content genres, especially news and domestic production. Alexander Dhoest and Marleen te Walvaart's discuss this in their chapter on PSM children's programming. (The importance of PSM as a collaborative hub and co-operative partner in overall domestic audiovisual production is treated in the chapter by Wauters and Raats, as earlier mentioned.) Many PSM organisations are networked media players that provide a needed counterweight to the potentially negative consequences of powerful, global and commercial intermediaries that are involved with everything and take a slice from every side, but so far resist taking responsibility. Indeed, a key problem of networks as such revolves around taking responsibility for irresponsible actions and ensuring healthy correctives. We think PSM can and must play this role. In practice, they are doing so already with positive results as exemplified in the cases reported by our authors.

A third problem with the networked society notion is the tendency for technological determinism, which suggests technology autonomously causes consequential things to happen *to* society – often to a degree that is overly optimistic or pessimistic with presumed impacts that affect humankind as a whole. As noted by Webster (2004) and Garnham (2004), this remains a persistent strand of discourse in academic research and policy work related to media and ICT (see Servaes 2014). In treating the transition from PSB to PSM, academic discourse has been rife with technological determinist arguments both for and against (Van den Bulck 2008; Donders 2012).

The belief that new media of communication cause fundamental changes to existing media and radically change the ways people interact and live is nothing new. Wildly optimistic or bleakly pessimistic predictions rarely come true, however. While changes in media systems can become fundamental, the impact on society relations tends to be incremental and only makes a significant difference over longer periods of time. Digitalisation is causing momentous changes in and for media, but to what ends and in which ways and degrees is still unclear. We think it unlikely this will transform the nature and identity of humankind any more than previous 'revolutions' in media. The deep roots grounding peoples and cultures will not disappear, nor will 'interactive' media replace interpersonal interaction. Raymond Williams' (1974) original contention that societal changes lead to technological developments, that human needs and dynamics shape technology (i.e. 'technological relativism'), puts the buzz about a networked society in a useful intellectual context. Although it is debatable whether technological determinism and relativism are a continuum or a duality (Taragas & Lin 2016), networked society proponents typically suppose the technology push is inevitable and all policy makers or anyone else can do is try to direct it. We disagree. The only thing inevitable is that humans will decide and determine our future.

Fourth, the influential strand of academic and activist discourse focused on building a technological democracy often consider networked media as the alternative needed to give voices to those who have been unheard and oppressed (e.g., Cammaerts & Carpentier 2007). This idea hinges on hopes that the paternalistic, top-down, elitist

orientation of legacy mass media (partly presumed and partly valid) will be overcome by community-based, bottom-up, democratic networked media that are open to all and used by everyone. The latter is questionable in the light of continuing disparities as evident in persistent problems with a growing digital divide, which might actually widen if the principle of 'net neutrality' is upended. Beyond this, the discourse hinges on a celebration of personalisation and individualism in media and all else. This is assumed to be useful for collective democracy but, so far, has not been proven.

This view is especially pronounced in Negroponte's (1996) book, *Daily Me*, which makes a case for personalisation tools helping people become better informed and emphasises new opportunities for accommodating diversity. In a similar vein, the (presumed) end of linear television is expected by adherents to open the way to highly personalised video consumption for improved entertainment (Barkhuus & Brown 2009). As Jannick Sørensen and Jonathon Hutchinson discuss in their chapter, the new media environment does provide opportunities for PSM to develop personalised services, but doing so hinges on using algorithms and bots that carry significant risks because the public service ethos and core values are perhaps impossible to encode, and such development may damage transparency, thereby eroding legitimacy.

In fact, there are mounting concerns about the impact of digital disruption on media's democratising role in societies, with worrisome signs in news and information services especially (i.e. fake news and propaganda). Growing online fragmentation was treated by Cass Sunstein (2001) who fretted about the balkanisation of 'public' opinion as private opinions to the detriment of public debate, and by Eli Pariser (2011) who observed the development of 'filter bubbles' when examining the consequences of growing fragmentation and polarisation linked to personalisation. Although these concerns may prove as exaggerated as the euphoric-utopian discourse, a strong focus on individualism raises important questions that are relevant to the need for PSM to help rectify negative effects.

Fifth, the networked society notion can be criticised for neglecting the problem of persistent as well as emerging social inequalities, and for failing to fulfil promises to empower individuals in practice. The inequalities between social groups in majority / minority populations are as evident today as ever, despite nearly twenty years of 'network society' development. We doubt there is a technology fix for engrained social inequities. On the contrary, given economic and literacy disparities that constrain full participation, it strikes us as odd to think social inequities could be resolved merely by providing more possibilities to link on proprietary networks. Furthermore, a network is by its very nature paradoxical because it simultaneously enables and constrains every participant and node that is linked with it (see Virta & Lowe 2017). What is good for the network as a whole might not be in the best interests of the individual, and vice versa. Nets not only connect but, like a fishing net, also trap.

Moreover, networks are not stable structures; they are transient and amorphous. In principle, an individual can tap into, activate, build or link with a network, but none of that is guaranteed. Networks collapse when a central node crashes, and are prone

to deliberate disruption through hacking and geo-blocking. Networks are continually changing, which means participation is in a continual state of flux. This suggests the importance of stable anchors because, as Castells and others recognise, the development of a networked society facilitates new forms of inclusion and exclusion. Those lacking the economic, educational or social means, or technical skills and access, will be left behind because they cannot use the network. Connection is a power issue, not only of the electrical kind. From their inception as PSB, the principle of inclusion and compensating for socio-cultural inequalities have been core values that continue to explain the mission of universalism for PSM. There is no convincing reason to think this role is less important today.

Sixth and finally, the networked society framework suffers from several problems observed in critiques of so-called 'creative industries' (Garnham 2005; Flew & Cunningham 2010). The heart of the networked society rationale is essentially economic rather than democratic, cultural or social. Its development is conceived as an inevitable result of managing creativity as an industrial factor linked to expectations for growth in national prosperity. The networked society construct is less about the society than the networks, and especially who owns them and to what ends. The primary intention of policy and investment in media in the online apparatus is for harvesting economic value (Porter & Kramer 2011). There are powerful vested interests in the telecom industry, among platform intermediaries, and for a plethora of corporate and state practices related to surveillance, data scraping, social monitoring and the covert influences of algorithmic structures. In the envisioned 'Internet of Things' (see Greengard 2015) as well as people (i.e. the networked society), power may no longer reside mainly in political institutions but rather in proprietary codes that are embedded in and direct networks – a point Castells acknowledged (2000: 25). In all of this, economic interests are a top priority.

This book takes a different perspective in pursuing more careful consideration of the public interest in the networked society as a construct, in policy, and in media's operational practices. The contributions comprising this volume explore a society's shared interest in networks, consider media networks' responsibilities to societies as owners, operators and governors, and examine the role of public service media companies and organisations in the emerging, often contradictory and paradoxical context. The authors deliberate on what is new and different in comparison to the heritage mission of PSB, and what is the same in PSM. And they collectively consider what is most pressing and of highest shared importance. Our departure point is both sceptical and aspirational, both analytical and normative, both forward-looking and historically-grounded. While by no means the last word on the issues we deliberate, we hope the book provides a good starting point.

Notes

1. Anthony Giddens' notion of 'time-space distanciation' (1981) and David Harvey's ideas about 'time-space compression' (1990) align rather well with Castells' understanding of networked society development as a phenomenon that encourages a "high-level cultural abstraction of space and time with dynamic interactions" (1989: 23).
2. An exception is made for states that are disposed to apply highly restrictive censorship and controls, which are not acceptable in Western democracies, so far at least. The future could be more uncertain in the West, however, given concerns about fake news and sophisticated propaganda and cyber warfare.

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Section I

Concepts and Critiques

An Impossible Challenge for Public Service Media?

The Intellectual Context of the Networked Society

Peter Goodwin

Abstract

This chapter examines why public service broadcasters have been marginalised in the network society by examining some of the key literature about the network society concept, especially the works of Castells and Negroponte and, more recently, Jenkins and Shirky. The ways in which this literature characterises the network society and some of the aspects of reality that reflects leave public service broadcasting on the margins, or deliberately constrained. The issues explored include globalisation, neo-liberalism, participatory culture and start-ups, and the place of PSB as publicly owned national corporations in the face of these issues. The chapter concludes by suggesting that the only way for PSB to find a way out of this increasing marginalisation is to reconsider its relationship to the recent ‘left-populist’ challenge to neo-liberalism.

Keywords: public service broadcasting, neo-liberalism, left populism, globalisation, legacy mass media, Americanisation, start-ups

Introduction

This chapter begins with the observation that legacy public service media (PSM) providers have been increasingly marginalised in the development of the networked society. ‘Legacy providers’ means those organisations that were once, and still are, more commonly called public service broadcasting (PSB) – organisations, such as the BBC in Britain, NHK in Japan, and RAI in Italy (etc.). ‘Increasingly marginalised’ doesn’t mean their traditional audiences have disappeared. On the contrary, in many cases those audiences have to date held up rather better than many pundits of the 1980s and 1990s expected. Nor have these organisations been stuck in a technological rut, failing to keep pace with developments. On the contrary, many established a significant web presence early on, and most have successfully innovated new ways to deliver their core products and services.

What I mean is that legacy PSM providers are becoming marginalised in networked society development. They have become increasingly marginal as compared to what are now the mainstream actors in the networked society – the platform giants and

their surrounding galaxy of start-ups. Perhaps more importantly, they have become increasingly marginal to debates addressing what are widely seen as the deficiencies of that network mainstream – threats to privacy, the commercialisation of data about private behaviour, market domination, fake news, etc.

I propose several reasons to explain why this has happened. I approach the task by examining prominent, influential strands of theoretical discourse legitimating the network/networked society construct since the mid-1990s. I want to reflect on core realities that characterise the changing economic, social and communications environment this discourse captures in order to contrast these strands of discourse with the intellectual make-up and institutional reality of legacy PSBs in the project of developing into PSM. This chapter builds on earlier critical analysis and discussion about this development trajectory (Goodwin 2014), characterised by Bardoel and Lowe (2007) as the ‘core challenge’ for the public service enterprise in media today.

To anticipate my argument, while the intellectual make-up and institutional reality of legacy PSB organisations was sufficiently robust to enable some to respond surprisingly well to the communication ‘revolutions’ of the late twentieth century, especially multi-channel television and the early online environment, the ways in which the networked society has been conventionally framed, and much of the environment in which it is being developed, systematically exclude the very legacy that would be necessary to legitimate their transformation to PSM. This therefore presents a seemingly insuperable challenge to their institutionally constructed intellectual make-up. I say ‘seemingly’ because the chapter ends with a discussion about what would be necessary for legacy PSB providers to effectively reinsert themselves in discourse(s) about PSM in networked societies.

More than just the internet

What, precisely, is implied by characterising society as a ‘network’ or ‘networked’ society? Would some other description be more illuminating? This is a matter of considerable debate. Equally debatable is deciding when this ‘reality’ came into existence, or if it really has fully come into existence yet. What is clear is that both the term and the emerging reality it attempts to describe became important in the 1980s with roots in earlier discourse about the ‘information society’. This discourse is closely associated with developments in computing and telecommunications, in particular the rise of the internet, the rapid diffusion of internet access and improvements in the quality of that access, and advances in internet-enabled (and enabling) devices and services. The network society notion and reality have (both) already gone through several qualitatively different phases of development. ‘Web 2.0’ is the popular term for characterising a newer phase in contrast with earlier ones.

From the beginning, most authors on the subject have understood the network society (or networked or information society), as being about considerably more than

changes in technology. Discussion has emphasised the importance of understanding changes in information technology in relation to major economic, social and cultural changes. This was pointedly articulated early on by Manuel Castells in his seminal 1996 volume *The Rise of the Network Society* – the first volume of a trilogy, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. As Frank Webster (2014: 106) recently observed:

Manuel Castells is the stand-out scholar of information issues and has been so for a generation. His trilogy [...] offered a systematic understanding of what Castells conceives of as the “network society”. *The Information Age* was reprinted often and has been translated into over twenty languages. Reviewers even ranked Castells alongside the classics of social thought [...]. [M]any regard Castells as a fitting successor to Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim.

There are at least three specific reasons why it is worth starting our survey with Castells’ volume. First, because *The Rise of the Network Society* was highly influential in popularising this notion (although Castells did not invent the term). Second, because it was written in 1995 when the World Wide Web had only just begun to take off and, in that regard, could be considered prescient. It was written at a time now seen as a crucial turning point in reality rather than being merely speculative (which may well explain why its second edition had to be extensively revised – things change fast in this field). Third, because Castells consciously adopted a tone of enquiry based on empirical evidence which produced useful questions for further consideration, rather than presenting a more typical case of shrill advocacy and hype that has infected ‘futurological’ contributions on the subject.

Regarding this latter point, Castells took a nuanced position on technological determinism, as evident in how he described the subject of his study: “...the emergence of a new social structure... [which] is associated with the emergence of a new mode of development, informationalisation, historically shaped by the restructuring of the capitalist mode of production towards the end of the twentieth century” (1996: 14). The restructuring of capitalism is the key idea here, resulting in what he termed a new “techno-economic system”, summarised as *informational capitalism* (ibid: 18). Castells argued that “the most decisive historical factor accelerating, channelling and shaping the information technology paradigm, and inducing its associated social forms, was/is the process of capitalist restructuring undertaken since the 1980s” (ibid).

In Castells’ view, this process originated in the crisis of the “Keynesian model of capitalist growth” in the 1970s, which resulted in a continuing series of institutional and management reforms intended to achieve four main goals:

1. Deepening the capitalist logic of profit-seeking in capital-labor relationships.
2. Enhancing the productivity of labor and capital.
3. Globalizing production, circulation and markets.

4. Marshalling the state's support for productivity gains and competitiveness of national economies, often to the detriment of social protection and public interest regulations.

Thus, he concluded that “without new information technology, global capitalism would have been a much-limited reality [...] *informationalism is linked to the expansion and rejuvenation of capitalism, as industrialism was linked to its continuation as a mode of production*” (Castells 1996: 19, emphasis added).

So, Castells' thesis argues that the network society is not merely about the spread of networked information technology (IT), but rather represents the creation of a new form of societal structure in a post-Keynesian restructuring of capitalism, of which IT was crucial but only one part. From this perspective, it is scarcely surprising that established PSB organisations would sit rather awkwardly in the new context. After all, PSB was established as, and has continued to be, a set of publicly owned national organisations as treated in earlier work (Lowe, Goodwin & Nobuto 2016).

Although some PSB organisations were established before the Keynesian era, their glory days were in that era, i.e. during and after World War II until the 1970s. PSB organisations had the very specific remit to do broadcasting, very often as a monopoly. This remit was easily extended from radio to television as a newer form of broadcasting. Unlike in the USA, the universal take up of television in Europe was largely led by PSB organisations. Television is the mass medium par excellence and was a phenomenon of the 'Keynesian era'. Its key features include one to many communication, a limited number of channels and therefore restricted choice, and the mass audience perspective. These attributes mirror key characteristics of the Keynesian era and, we might note from a different theoretical perspective, are also seen as defining characteristics of 'Fordism' – a mass orientation embodied in mass production, mass markets, etc.

We should also observe that the fundamentally *national* constitution of PSB has run counter to the increasing *globalisation* of production, circulation and markets in media, which Castells (and others) identify as a cornerstone of the new informational society. Although few writers on the network society directly referred to PSB, Castells did note that the “new technologies transformed the world of media” (1996: 337). In Europe, that 'world' featured legacy PSB institutions. In the 1970s and 1980s, the rapid diffusion of cable, satellite and the VCR, and a multiplicity of new private commercial channels, segmented and diversified audiences. In one notable case, France's TF1, a major publicly owned channel was privatised. Everywhere “investment has poured into the communications field as mega-groups have been formed and strategic alliances have been established to carve out market shares in a market in complete transformation” (ibid: 340). Here too Castells' position was nuanced: “While the media have become indeed globally interconnected, and programs and messages circulate in the global network, *we are not living in a global village but in customized cottages globally produced and locally distributed*” (ibid: 341, emphasis in original). In his nuanced position on global production and local distribution, it is evident that PSB has little

space as a nationally-based enterprise. By their very constitution, PSB organisations are and have always been tightly engaged with and focused on national production. While that provides some advantages, as discussed later, it is a significant problem for PSB in the globalised environment of media enterprises, contents and services that are characteristic of a networked society.

Neo-liberalism and Americanness

Another aspect of the multi-faceted network society identified by Castells should also be emphasised. Although he did not use the term ‘neo-liberalism’, the process of “capitalist restructuring” links the rise of the networked society with the growth of neo-liberal philosophy that has become the dominant ideology and generally accepted norm in mainstream politics and policy since the 1980s. As David Harvey (2005: 1) observed, writing explicitly about neo-liberalism, the turning point that established this dominance was between 1978 and 1980, with the elections of Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Regan in the USA. In the same period, Deng Xiaoping launched increasingly significant economic reforms in the People’s Republic of China. We need to recognise this obvious but hugely important fact: The network society has developed and come of age entirely during the period when neo-liberalism has been the dominant and official world view. This fact has enormous implications for the role (and lack of a role) that PSB can have within the network society.

For the most part, PSB has been and remains a group of publicly owned corporations – precisely the sort of organisational form that neo-liberalism set out to get rid of, with considerable success. Although privatisation has been comparatively rare so far (TF1 being the most notable exception), neo-liberal policy has aggressively sought to restrict state activity on the premise that state aid causes ‘unfair’ competition that stifles ‘natural’ commercial opportunities for private enterprise. This has made it very difficult for PSB organisations to expand into activities beyond a strict rendering of their ‘broadcasting remit’. In practice, this means PSB is intentionally constrained from fully participating in the network society. PSB, like all remaining public organisations (apart perhaps from the military), has increasingly been squeezed financially. This, too, is in keeping with neo-liberal orthodoxy and has made expansionary development more difficult.

Finally, we should note Castells’ observations about the historic origins of the “new technological paradigm” of the network society, which is important enough to merit an extended quotation:

That the constitution of this paradigm took place in the United States, and to some extent in California, and in the 1970s, probably had considerable consequences for the forms and evolution of new information technologies. [Despite the earlier role of military funding], the technological blossoming that took place in the early 1970s can

be somehow related to the culture of freedom, individual innovation and entrepreneurialism that grew out from the 1960s culture of American campuses [...] in regard to breaking away from established patterns of behaviour, both in society at large and in the business world. The emphasis on personalised devices, on interactivity, on networking, and the relentless pursuit of new technological breakthroughs, even when it apparently did not make much business sense, was clearly in discontinuity with the somewhat cautious tradition of the corporate world. (Castells 1996: 5-6)

In my view, it is important to understand the essential ‘Americanness’ of the network society notion and subsequent developments. Necessary because public service broadcasting has always been, and continues to be (with due apologies to NPR and PBS) far more marginal to media and culture in the United States than other OECD countries. Public broadcasting is not unimportant in the USA, but it has nowhere near the political weight or social and cultural influences that the BBC has in the UK or NHK has in Japan, for example. Given the fact that (as Castells who is European notes) the network society framework was born in, developed by and is discussed overwhelmingly within an American sensibility, it is scarcely surprising that PSB has struggled to find a role in it – even as the actual network society in practice has engulfed non-American audiences.

The individual versus media; small versus large

Two further aspects of PSB are relevant to how these organisations might see themselves fitting (or not) into the network society. The first, as alluded to earlier, is that they are (and always have been) *mass media* organisations. One striking trait in much of the early rhetoric about the network society is a contemptuous view of mass media. Nicholas Negroponte’s book (1995), *Being Digital*, is a notable unexceptional example. He notoriously predicted that “what will happen to broadcast television over the next five years is so phenomenal that it’s difficult to comprehend”, and “media barons of today will be grasping to hold on to their centralized empires tomorrow” (Negroponte 1995: 54, 59).

Twenty-two years on, it is easy to mock these predictions, as Henry Jenkins did (2006: 5). In August 2017, the media conglomerates built by Rupert Murdoch and Sumner Redstone are very much alive, as are Time Warner and Disney – and it should be added in this context, also the BBC, NHK, ZDF, etc. Negroponte made the not very novel mistake of believing that the rise of a new form of media would drive out the old, rather than expecting their co-existence and reflexive evolution (the very point Jenkins makes in his convergence thesis). Although clearly an error in hindsight, the widespread anti-mass media rhetoric of early new media evangelists would understandably encourage PSB organisations (along with their commercial colleagues) to worry about having any future in a network society to the extent that they remained

fundamentally about broadcasting. Despite Negroponte's unfortunate rhetorical predictions, he made a substantial point that is highly relevant here:

In the post-information age, we often have an audience the size of one. Everything is made to order, and information is extremely personalized. A widely-held assumption is that individualization is the extrapolation of narrowcasting – you go from a large to a small to a smaller group, ultimately to the individual. By the time you have my address, my income, my car brand, my purchases, my drinking habits, and my taxes, you have me – a demographic unit of one. This line of reasoning completely misses the fundamental difference between narrowcasting and being digital. In being digital I am *me*, not a statistical subset. Me includes information and events that have no demographic or statistical meaning. Where my mother-in-law lives, whom I had dinner with last night, and what time my flight departs for Richmond this afternoon have absolutely no correlation or statistical basis from which to derive suitable narrowcast services. (Negroponte 1995: 164)

Leaving aside the fact that Google and Facebook have since developed massively successful business models utilising the digital activities of *me*, Negroponte made a shrewd point about the ineffectiveness of using the broadcasting-derived concept of 'narrowcasting' to think through potential developments in the network society. It was precisely that way of approaching network society opportunities that came most naturally to broadcasting and other mass media organisations, commercial and public alike. Thus, despite impressive exceptions (such as iPlayer at the BBC) it should not be surprising that most of the important new developments in network society media have come from start-ups rather than established mass media organisations. PSB was never primarily about serving the particular interests of individuals, but rather meeting the broad, shared (often presumed) needs of societies overall. That was Media 1.0. This perspective is engrained in PSB practice and embedded in its organisational mandates.

The second obvious fact about PSB is that in general these organisations have been comparatively large in their domestic contexts. That might be thought to offer a special leverage for intervening in the emerging network society, but one complication is that so much of the rhetoric about the network society has emphasised possibilities open to small start-ups unconstrained by the need for an established distribution infrastructure. A more nuanced version of this rhetoric was presented by a leading journalist for the *Economist*, Frances Cairncross, in her 2001 book titled *The Death of Distance 2.0: How the Communications Revolution will Change our Lives*. In the introductory section, 'Trendspotters Guide to New Communication', Cairncross bullet pointed a number of "important developments to look out for". One is especially important here: "More Minnows, More Giants". She suggests:

Many of the costs of starting a new business will fall and companies will more easily buy in services. So, small companies will start up more readily, offering services that in the past only giants had the scale and the scope to provide. If they can back

creativity with competence and speed, they will compete effectively with larger firms. At the same time, communication amplifies the strength of brands and the power of networks. In industries where networks matter, concentration will increase. (Cairncross 2001: xii)

This implies that PSM organisations are not well positioned for success in the network society context. They are not small start-ups – indeed, small start-ups are often considered a serious threat to established mass media players (and perhaps an even larger threat to established national commercial media firms). At the same time, PSB organisations have little or no opportunity to take advantage of international concentration which greatly benefits larger national commercial media organisations. Again, PSB is nationally constrained even if their brand is often an asset at home. But unlike commercial competitors, they are being politically constrained from refreshing themselves through acquiring or bankrolling start-ups. Thus, from the very beginnings of the network society as a substantial reality since the 1990s, both the rhetoric surrounding this and much of the reality have been particularly uncondusive for PSB playing a positive role.

One of the few areas in which (neo-liberal) governments did briefly flirt with giving PSB organisations some positive task in constructing the network society was the development of digital terrestrial television (DTT). Many observers in the mid-1990s were unconvinced that take-up of the ‘information superhighway’ (i.e. the internet) would spread from a relatively small elite of educated and youthful people to the broad mass of populations. In both the UK and Italy, for example, DTT was seen briefly as an alternative route to the information superhighway. Despite an early government preference in the UK for commercial broadcasters, PSB organisations proved rather more effective in dealing with the development of DTT. However, as domestic internet penetration continued to grow rapidly, without hitting the anticipated barriers, this ‘alternative route’ was abandoned.

Having discussed the pessimistic perspective on PSB as PSM in the networked society context, we should also consider important developments that PSB has made in this regard.

Several public service broadcasting successes

Without very much government encouragement – and sometimes despite outright government opposition – PSB organisations have accomplished three things that have made a positive intervention in the early stages of network society development.

First, PSB increased the number of channels they operate in an expanding multi-channel environment produced by satellite, cable and digital terrestrial distribution. Most, if not all, have produced specialist channels, for example in news and for children’s programming, and even international channels. Second, like their newspaper counterparts in mass media, they have often been pioneers in the early creation of

websites to publicise their conventional programming and to provide another outlet for their often highly respected news and other programming services. Ironically, however, this has brought them into fairly direct competition with commercial newspaper publishers as sources of online news, leading to considerable complication with competition authorities. Third, and more recently, PSB organisations (along with, but sometimes in advance of, commercial broadcasters) have pioneered web-based ‘catch up’ services (like the BBC iPlayer), thus moving away from the linear broadcasting model.

Several things should be noted about these PSB successes, however. Importantly, all these developments are directly related to PSB’s traditional broadcast remit. The focus is on the core products and services, albeit in more flexible and varied ways. Moreover, these developments were accomplished without additional revenues. This has caused financial complications and some of the ventures, particularly international ones, were primarily designed as revenue earners rather than as public services per se. This creates contradictions that matter for PSB legitimacy. Finally, in some cases even these ventures – for instance news websites, or putting traditional PSB educational functions on the web – were viewed by both commercial rivals and neo-liberal governments as creating ‘unfair competition’ or ‘stifling commercial initiative’, and therefore restricted. In some cases, they have actually been terminated, as with the BBC’s online educational service (BBC Jam) that was ended by the BBC Trust after one year as a result of complaints by commercial rivals (BBC News 2007).

Thus, even the early successes of PSB in the network society context have been constrained by the inhibiting factors earlier discussed. Meanwhile, we have seen rapid development of the network society since 2000 in both the diffusion and capacity of internet access and quality (especially due to broadband). We have seen enormous developments in the quality of and take up of internet enabled devices, especially the rise of the smart phone, and an explosion of social media. While in principle ‘Web 2.0’ presented a tremendous range of opportunities for PSM development, the inhibiting factors we have identified constrained this potential in practice. And these factors were compounded by powerful new ones. Two prominent and influential books addressing Web 2.0 illustrated what was new.

Henry Jenkins 2006 work *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, and Clay Shirky’s 2008 work *Here Comes Everybody: How Change Happens When People Come Together*, are important for the focus of discussion in this chapter.

Both begin with anecdotes to illustrate and dramatise the arguments each develops (neatly encapsulated in their respective subtitles). Jenkins’ opener is the story of how a high school student created a Photoshop image of a Sesame Street character with Osama Bin Laden, how he posted it on his homepage as part of a series he called ‘Bert is Evil’, and how that image was picked up by a Bangladeshi publisher for an image of Bin Laden that was printed on anti-American signs, posters and T-shirts, which were in turn filmed and broadcast by CNN (Jenkins 2006: 1-2). Shirky opens with the story of a woman who left her expensive mobile phone in a New York City taxi,

how she asked a programmer friend to help get the phone back, how he mobilised online to accomplish that, how the phone turned up in the hands of a teenage girl who refused to give it back and how, after much collective involvement and discussion (and some online threats and racial abuse, extensive press coverage, and a hasty policy turn around by the New York Police Department), the teenage girl was arrested and the phone returned (Shirky 2008: 1-11).

Jenkins' story illustrates his theme of "convergence culture, where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways" (Jenkins 2006: 2). Shirky's tale demonstrates

how dramatically connected we've become to one another. It demonstrates the ways in which the information we give off about ourselves, in photos and e-mails and MySpace pages and all the rest of it, has dramatically increased our social visibility and made it easier for us to find each other but also to be scrutinised in public. It demonstrates that the old limitations of media have been radically reduced, with much of the power accruing to the former audience. It demonstrates how a story can go from local to global in a heart-beat. And it demonstrates the ease and speed with which a group can be mobilized for the right kind of cause. (Shirky 2008: 11-12)

Jenkins and Shirky offered different takes on what they both saw as a new networked environment, but they equally emphasised the bottom-up participatory culture that new environment facilitates. Neither was unaware of problems such a participatory culture might involve, as their observations on the respective opening case studies show. But the overall emphasis of their books was to value and celebrate this. From the perspective of PSB, however, Jenkins' and Shirky's opening anecdotes look rather different.

Both authors demonstrate rather dramatically the perils that PSB might face by involving themselves in this participatory culture. These would include copyright infringement, promoting vigilante justice or racism, and association with terrorism, to name but several. For PSB this makes for a particularly frightening vision, for two reasons. First, because the traditional make up of PSB has prioritised top-down responsibility. Controversial matters are referred upwards and, if possible, avoided. Second, despite some loosening of heritage mindsets and structures as a result of the cultural revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s, in recent decades PSB organisations have been politically-besieged institutions, mindful that any 'slip' could have disastrous political (and financial) consequences. Letting control out of their hands by engaging themselves in the bottom-up participatory cultures celebrated by Jenkins and Shirky would inevitably increase the chances of such 'slips' happening.

What I have argued so far is that both the rhetoric and, to a considerable degree, the reality of the network society has been extremely unfavourable to the intervention of PSB. From every angle surveyed here, these legacy providers find themselves blocked or inhibited from being full participants in this environment. Historically and

rhetorically, the network society paradigm has been bound up with the political and economic environment of neo-liberalism, in which publicly owned PSB organisations are, at best, begrudged survivors. Being fundamentally national organisations they are prevented from engaging in the globalisation of networked societies, and as broadcasters they lack the mindset to successfully intervene in its far more individualised forms of communication. And, with PSB's traditional remit being tightly specifically formulated on broadcasting, hostile governments and commercial rivals find it easy to argue they shouldn't be intervening in these new forms of communication in the first place. Finally, fostering and intervening in the live mass bottom-up participatory cultures of the network society is both extremely problematic to their traditional sense of top-down social responsibility and poses all sorts of dangers (both perceived and real) for upsetting their precarious relationship with government.

What is to be done?

What would it take for the established PSBs to play a central role in the network society? At the very least it would clearly require a substantial change of internal corporate mindset, as sometimes recognised by prominent figures within PSB organisations – particularly those who are responsible for 'new media' development. Intriguingly, Jenkins favourably quotes a speech at length from Ashley Highfield, Director of BBC New Media and Technology in 2003, talking about the coming break down of the relationship between "the traditional monologue broadcaster" and the "grateful viewer" (Jenkins 2006: 242). Fourteen years later there is little evidence that the corporate mindset inside PSB as a whole has put aside this broadcasting heritage. Why not? In the light of all that I have discussed, it should be clear what would be required for PSB organisations to fully grapple with the challenges and opportunities presented by the network society. Three requirements are particularly important:

1. Public broadcasters would have to invest substantial resources in areas quite outside their traditional (and often legally-mandated) broadcasting remits. And they would have to do so in the full knowledge that even with the best planning it's possible that many of the new initiatives will turn out to be failures or dead ends.
2. They would have to adopt a far more democratic and participatory attitude to those involved in new public service networked initiatives. But democracy and participation inevitably bring their own headaches, even to institutions that are thoroughly used to them, never mind for 'traditional monologue broadcasters'.
3. They would have to make a 'political' (with, for the moment, a small 'p') case to their viewers and license payers about why they were doing these things rather than leaving network initiatives to the market and instead concentrating on their traditional (and often much loved) broadcast programming.

They would have to do these things under adverse conditions, when budgets are squeezed and in political environments where governmental and regulatory actors are, in general, deeply hostile to PSB expanding into fields many believe should be properly left to the commercial sector. That sector would itself be vocally hostile to PSB ‘muscling into’ territory it considers its own. The commercial sector has had and would continue to have the ear of government and regulators on this issue. And commercial media would be more than happy to magnify their own message to the general public – a general public which is still, to a considerable degree, accepting of neo-liberal ‘common sense’ when it comes to networked information technologies. Thus, those inside PSB who are trying to change their mindset to foster new initiatives for full involvement in the network society face a number of very powerful external obstacles, and are likely to be seen internally as taking politically provocative and costly risks.

I hope there are managers and makers in PSB organisations who are willing to defy the external and internal obstacles, and willing to take those risks. But unless and until there is a significantly changed political climate, it will require enormous bravery. And yet, such bravery might pay off just now because in the wider world outside debates about PSB as PSM there are significant stirrings against the neo-liberal order. Although ‘right-wing populists’ are probably even more hostile to PSB than the neo-liberal establishment, ‘left-wing populists’ would potentially be far more sympathetic to the sort of initiatives I have described. Another problem for PSB organisations, however, is that they have long been seen by ‘left populists’ as part of the neo-liberal establishment (and have probably been rather relieved to be so seen). So, while defence of established public initiatives like healthcare and social services are a prominent part of the ‘left populist’ agenda, defence of PSB has not been. For established PSB organisations or, more likely, brave souls within them, to play a central part in opening space for PSM in the network society will require engaging with this ‘left populism’. There is no escaping the need to move from a focus on the small ‘p’ form of the political to the big P Political form. Correction: There is an all too easy escape – continued stagnation and decline.

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Reclaiming Digital Space

From Commercial Enclosure to the Broadcast Commons

Graham Murdock

Abstract

In 2004, I floated the idea of creating a digital commons with public service broadcasters as the central hub in an online public space that would combine the holdings and expertise of established public cultural institutions with the energy and creativity of grassroots activity on the internet. The virtual monopoly control of the popular internet now exercised by a handful of giant commercial companies (the digital majors) renders this ambition more relevant than ever for the future of public culture and democratic life. Realising it under current conditions requires interventions that reach beyond the organisation of collaboration and co-creation to engage with the environmental damage and social exploitation embedded in the infrastructures and devices that support these activities. This chapter underlines the renewed urgency of building a digital commons, reviews barriers to its realisation, and details persistent and emerging issues that must be engaged.

Keywords: digital commons, cultural institutions, networked society, internet giants, media infrastructures, commercial enclosure

Introduction

One of the most memorable scenes in the lavish celebration of imagined Britishness that opened the 2012 London Olympics depicts the country's transition from industrial to information capitalism. A crowded vista of factory chimneys and molten metal, presided over by Isambard Brunel, the principal architect of the railways, bridges and iron ships that formed the connecting backbone for the new economic order, gives way to a plain cube in an otherwise empty space. Its only occupant is Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web, the network of invisible digital connections that has become an essential support for personal, corporate, and governmental activity in the new capitalism. Behind him, a lighted banner, stretched around the stadium, declared "This is for Everyone".

This promise of universality was at the core of the Berners-Lee vision. As he explained on the Web's twentieth anniversary in 2010, he set out to build a system that

allowed anyone, anywhere, to navigate the myriad of available sites in any way they chose and “to put anything on the Web [...] no matter what computer they have, software they use or human language they speak” (Berners-Lee 2010: 80). This design principle and the wider complex of professional and consumer digital technologies that are reorganising access and production, support new horizontal connections and new vertical pathways for distribution.

The first substantial project to employ digital networking to explore new forms of collaboration was the open source software movement. Launched in opposition to the growing domination of proprietary software controlled by commercial operators led by Microsoft, it invited programmers to contribute to developing a portfolio of freely accessible alternatives. This was followed by Wikipedia in 2001, which asked anyone who wished to share their knowledge of a particular topic to contribute to a universal online encyclopedia that could be continually updated. Both initiatives were based on peer-to-peer exchanges underpinned by a moral economy of reciprocity – the ‘gift economy’. Contributors donated their time and expertise but imposed a moral obligation on those who benefitted to return these gifts by making their own contribution to the pool of openly shared resources. Both ventures connected professionals and amateurs. Contributions were made by hackers and software specialists.

The expansion of horizontal networks of participation and collaboration was accompanied by a growing realisation that digital technologies could help address problems faced by museums, libraries and other publicly funded cultural institutions. Firstly, by releasing evaluations of success from previous raw counts of visitor footfalls or audience attendance and widening access, digitalising holdings and resources strengthened claims of delivering value for money which bolstered their claims on public funding. Secondly, by abolishing physical constraints on storage and display digital archiving offered opportunities to respond to mounting popular demands that public collections should include vernacular materials that recorded everyday experience and spoke to the histories of marginalised groups.

It was clear from an early point in the Web’s development, however, that the main public cultural institutions saw themselves as distinctive with their own unique histories and ways of working, rather than as clusters of resources within a wider network of provision whose public value would be maximised by collaboration. Relevant materials were scattered across multiple sites, each with its own conditions of access and participation. Thinking about this problem led me to argue that the situation offered public service broadcasters an unprecedented opportunity to demonstrate their continued centrality to public culture by integrating PSB with the open Web and thereby lay the basis for a ‘digital commons’ that would combine the dynamism of voluntary participation with the expertise of established cultural institutions. This could produce an unparalleled pool of openly available resources and opportunities for creativity, self-development, collaboration, innovation, and inclusiveness.

I first floated this argument in a public lecture in Canada titled, *Building the Digital Commons: Public Broadcasting in the Age of the Internet*, which celebrated the life

and work of Graham Spry, the principle driving force behind the country's decision to develop a public broadcasting system. The transcript was later published in the RIPE@2005 Reader (Murdock 2005). The ideas were further developed in a series of writings (see Murdock 2010, 2014). Everything that has happened since has convinced me the case for public broadcasting's role as the pivotal node in a digital commons is stronger than ever. There are two main reasons.

Firstly, we are witnessing an accelerating enclosure of digital space with command over routine daily uses of the internet increasingly concentrated in the hands of corporations that exercise monopoly control over their primary areas of operation. Google dominates search. Facebook monopolises social media use. Amazon has commandeered online retailing. Apple is a major provider of smartphones and tablets that have overtaken laptop computers as the primary point of access to the Web. Because of its continuing embeddedness in everyday life, public broadcasting is the only effective counter to the deepening commercial colonisation of digital public life. This role matters fundamentally to the democratic health and general commonwealth of a networked society. Secondly, at the very moment when a concerted push to build a comprehensive digital commons is most needed, the combination of continuing cuts in public funding and a political climate anchored in militant advocacy of market competition has seen PSB scaling back ambitions. Should this continue, the future of public culture is seriously at risk. Thus, what does and doesn't happen is of central relevance to the character and quality of social life in networked societies.

The rise and rise of digital majors

Neither Google nor Facebook were major forces in shaping the digital landscape that was emerging when I delivered the Spry lecture in 2004. That year saw the launch of Facebook and a significant expansion in Google's operations as the company issued its first tranche of public shares. I failed to anticipate how rapidly they would come to dominate everyday internet use. I was not alone. Many observers maintained a residual romanticism at the time, viewing the internet as a force for creative disruption, for undermining established centres of power, for replacing vertical hierarchies with horizontal planes of interaction, and operating to support widening participation rather than entrenched domination. Commentators conceded that control over established print and audiovisual sectors was becoming concentrated in the hands of a steadily shrinking number of mega communication conglomerates and imagined the internet as a system without a centre, constructed to distribute rather than consolidate power. This optimism has dissipated.

Initial enthusiasm for the internet as the essential hub for an emerging digital capitalism led, between 1997 and 2001, to a flurry of speculative investments in new dot.com companies without a track record of profits. The dot-com bubble burst in 2001-2002, which significantly reduced the level of competition and left the field

open to a few companies like Google and Amazon that survived the meltdown. It also opened the market to new entrants with clear business plans, like Facebook whose CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, recognised he was entering the platform business rather than the content business. He was a landlord, not a factory owner. Aside from advertising, everything that appeared on the site was provided by users whose interests and social networks were then tracked and analysed to produce data that could be sold to companies wanting to target promotional appeals precisely. The business model was based on systematic and continuous commercial surveillance, a point to which I will return.

Once established, the leading players have enjoyed cumulative advantages from network effects that encourage people to join sites with the largest number of users, and from financial resources that enable these firms to diversify services they offer and buy-out potential competitors. Google's purchase of YouTube in 2006, and Facebook's acquisition of Instagram in 2012 and the instant messaging system WhatsApp in 2014, are textbook instances. A virtual monopoly position in one sector allows the leading company in each to promote other services at the expense of competitors. In June 2017, following a lengthy inquiry, the EU Competition Commissioner, Margarethe Vestager, announced that "Google had abused its market dominance as a search engine by promoting its own comparison shopping service in its search results, and demoting those of competitors", thereby denying "European consumers a genuine choice of services" (Boffey 2017). This illegal practice resulted in a record fine of 2.42 billion British pounds.

The digital giants have also moved into television programming to become direct competitors with established public service broadcasters. Amazon offers an expanding suite of programmes on its Prime service, Google has established dedicated channels on its YouTube subsidiary, and Facebook has launched its Watch service. In addition, online programme distributors, led by Netflix, are developing a significant presence in original production. None of these offerings match the full diversity of output provided by PSB. They are expressly designed to promote genres already popular with viewers (younger ones especially) who increasingly access television on smartphones and tablets.

Market dominance and their aggressive pursuit of competitive advantage has propelled a small group of digital majors to the front rank of global corporations. In 2016, Apple, Google's holding company Alphabet, and Microsoft led the list of the world's largest corporations by market capitalisation, with Amazon in sixth place and Facebook in seventh – in total, five of the top seven (Economist 2016: 5). Ownership is unusually concentrated because shares issued to the public generally carry no voting rights in elections to a company's governance boards. Control over corporate decision making and strategy remains securely in the hands of company founders. As a consequence, the dominant organisation and vision of the networked culture and its sociality are determined by a handful of young, privileged, white, American, males. Other social interests and claims are pushed to the margins, or excluded altogether.

Digital enclosures

The history of the commons is a history of enclosure. From fences erected around land and natural resources that had previously been available for collective use, to private developments that colonised public space in the industrial city, struggles to preserve the commons have centred on opposition to the commercial appropriation of shared resources. In the same way, digital enclosure operates to restrict and regulate control over access, information, interaction, and identity.

One of the most far reaching and least noticed alterations in terms of access to the internet has been the shift away from hyperlinks that facilitated internet navigation on desktop and laptop computers to applications, ‘apps’ for short, that organise access on smartphones and tablets. This is a movement from open to closed systems because hyperlinks allow users to travel freely between sites by clicking on the URL (uniform resource locator) that allocates each site a unique identity, while apps lock users into bounded domains they must log out of to move to another site. Added to which, the suppliers of hand-held devices reserve the right to determine which apps can be loaded onto their machines. As Tim Berners-Lee noted, “people may find that closed worlds are just fine. These worlds are easy to use [...]. [But] ‘walled gardens’ no matter how pleasing, can never compete in diversity, richness and innovation with the mad, throbbing Web market outside their gates” (Berners-Lee 2010: 83).

Enclosure is central to Facebook’s organisation, evident from the company’s total control over the way information contained in participants’ postings are assembled and interrogated to micro-managing external material posted on their sites. Computer algorithms analyse user activities and their networks of on-site friends to direct precisely targeted advertising and tailored selections of news. As a result, users are locked into a series of ‘filter bubbles’ that reinforce already established tastes, opinions and affiliations, screening out novel experiences and contrary positions (Pariser 2012).

This intensified personalisation runs directly counter to the core democratic principle of open and respectful deliberation on issues of common concern. Providing these essential cultural resources for the exercise of active citizenship has been at the heart of PSB’s social project from the outset. It has not always been achieved, but it is an abiding core ambition. Erecting self-defined enclosures online undermines the promise of a universal public sphere by discouraging engagement with unfamiliar lives and ideas, and reinforcing the potential for misperceptions and antagonisms. One outcome is an increase in abusive speech online as opponents confront each other across walls with language rooted in contempt and insults that reinforce partisanship and antagonism. This discourages principled engagement and begs the question as to what type of society a networked society really is.

Algorithms are an essential feature of commercially networked media that exercise power without accountability. Producing news and comment for any communication medium inevitably involves making creative and editorial choices of what to present and how. The selections that comprise broadcast programme schedules are immedi-

ately visible to anyone watching and can be evaluated and critiqued against publically negotiated professional and ethical standards, with responsibility assigned to those who made the decisions. In contrast, the bases on which algorithms make decisions is embedded in proprietary computer code that is vigilantly guarded as commercial trade secrets. This allows code owners to operate as “stealthy but extremely potent gatekeepers unaccompanied by transparency and visibility” (Tufekci 2015: 209). The argument that transferring selection from humans to machines abolishes partiality and bias conveniently forgets that algorithms are written by people and therefore likely to reflect their world views. They may also have unanticipated consequences.

The digital majors operate a system of programmatic advertising in which advertisers bid for particular audience segments but don’t know what content will appear alongside their ads. As the history of tabloid media demonstrates, sensation attracts attention. As a consequence, some advertisers using YouTube found themselves sharing space with videos promoting extremism and hate speech. The problem was compounded by Google’s long-standing arrangement of passing part of the advertising revenue on to the originators of the post, thereby placing advertisers in the position of inadvertently funding extremist causes. In the Spring of 2017, a number of household name companies, including Pepsi and Wallmart, boycotted Google. The company responded by hiring more human moderators to root out offensive content, a strategy also adopted by Facebook, which faced similar criticisms.

This is significant because it repositions these firms as publishers with responsibility for the material they distribute. But the staffing levels in both companies now devoted to making editorial judgements fall far short of what is needed to cope effectively with the daily torrent of postings. Facebook’s moderators complain they only have ten seconds to make a judgement. Leaked copies of the guidelines raise questions about decision-making criteria. Threatening speech is allowed if it is judged to be generic or not credible in prompting action. Instances offered to illustrate include, “Let’s beat up fat kids” and “I hope someone kills you”. The company classifies these as expressions of frustration and anger, not actual intention, arguing that users “feel safe” voicing such sentiments online because they “feel that the issue won’t come back to them, and they feel indifferent towards the person they are making the threats about because of the lack of empathy created by communication via devices as opposed to face-to-face” (quoted in Hopkins 2017). Tolerance of contempt sharply contrasts with PSB’s ambition to cultivate a community of citizens who merit mutual recognition, and tolerance, encouraging audiences to enter the lives of strangers with respect, to experience and understand the world from unfamiliar vantage points, and to negotiate differences through measured discussion.

By now entrenched features of online interaction demonstrate why it has become so difficult to sustain a generalised public cultural sphere based on informed deliberation. The digital majors are eroding the culture of citizenship. This assault is compounded by relentlessly addressing users in their role as consumers rather than citizens, and by deploying user data for commercial rather than social purposes. From its outset,

PSB has sought to address listeners and viewers primarily as citizens, as members of a social and moral community with political rights to self-determination and corresponding responsibilities to contribute to the quality of collective life. In contrast, the business logic of advertising-supported media requires companies to address users as consumers pursuing personal pleasure and advantage through the purchase of commodities and services. Media as a marketplace displaces the civic realm as the primary space for self-definition and social action. In an instructive study, when researchers asked participants to think of themselves as consumers rather than citizens, the participants were significantly more likely to endorse values of wealth, personal success and competition (Bauer et al. 2012).

The rise of the digital majors has intensified the citizen-consumer opposition. In the absence of effective regulation, one consequence is a massive expansion in 'native advertising' that integrates commercial appeals into the flow of creative expression, news reporting, and everyday conversation. Company logos and products are incorporated as enticing advergames for children. Bots and 'sock puppets,' masquerading as ordinary consumers, endorse and recommend products online. Product placement deals ensure that brands are presented as indispensable supports and signals of the aspirational lifestyles promoted in films and televisual programming. The growth of mobile devices as the preferred point of entry to the internet makes them the primary engines driving the hyper-consumption this new promotionally-saturated cultural environment supports, and makes them key players in reorganising purchasing behaviour by popularising touch-based payment systems that encourage the instant translation of desire into possession. This self-enclosure within a world view that equates society with the market and promotes its core value of competitive individualism is reinforced by the digital majors' co-optation of effective social agency.

The heart of the citizenship ideal is the right of everyone to participate in shaping the institutions that govern their lives and allocate their life chances. The digital majors have suspended that right. Users have no control over what information is collected about them, how it is subsequently used, or who purchases it. In the physical world, regulatory regimes give citizens the right and opportunity to hold schools, hospitals, tax authorities and other social agencies that store their personal data accountable for mistakes and misuses. Online they become serfs whose labour produces a surplus that is appropriated by their digital landlords to use and distribute as they please.

In addition to identifying market niches, data analysis can be used to categorise people as generally valued or risky. Taking the ubiquitous 'Like' function on Facebook, researchers were able to predict not only the age, gender and ethnicity of users, but also their sexual orientation, personality traits, and religious and political views with eighty to ninety per cent accuracy (Kosinski et al. 2013). Facebook routinely supplements these basic analyses with a wealth of material provided by our other online interactions. In May 2017, an investigation by the French regulatory agency, the Commission Nationale de l'Informatique et des Libertés (CNIL 2017), found that in addition to the massive compilation "of personal data of internet users in order to

display targeted advertising”, Facebook had “collected data on browsing activity of users on third-party websites, via the ‘data’ cookie, without their knowledge”. These data-driven identities have real world material consequences in areas from insurance and health care to employment and housing. As the authors of the Facebook study concede, “the predictability of individual attributes from digital records of behaviour may have considerable negative implications [...]. One can imagine situations in which such predictions, even if incorrect, could pose a threat to an individual’s well-being, freedom or even life” (op cit: 5805). Belated recognition of the unaccountable power accumulated by the digital majors has prompted a series of counter measures to restore individual rights. Breaches of personal privacy revealed by the CNIL investigation led French authorities to fine Facebook 150,000 Euros, and a number of countries in Europe and elsewhere are planning to introduce variants of ‘right to be forgotten’ provisions that will give users the right to delete misleading or other stored digital materials about them.

In a 2016 speech, President of the European Union Parliament, Martin Schultz, warned of a new cultural totalitarianism because our digital future is being determined behind closed doors without public consultation and is designed to advance corporate ambitions rather than the public interest. “Facebook, Google, Alibaba, and Amazon”, he warned, “must not be allowed to shape the new world order. They have no mandate to do so! It is and must remain the proper task of the democratically elected representatives of the people to [...] take decisions which apply to everyone” (Schultz 2016). This warning acquires added urgency with rapid growth of the ‘internet of things’, built on the basis of intelligent machines. The digital majors who already command the social internet are playing a leading role in this development. There are already more machines communicating over the internet than human conversations and interactions. Machines are talking about us and collecting ever more information about the ways we live and what we think. In 2015, it was revealed that the voice recognition feature on the remote-control console for the latest generation of Samsung’s smart television sets could record whatever was said when the console was turned on. As the small print in the company’s purchase agreement noted, “if your spoken words include personal or other sensitive information, that information will be among data captured and transmitted to a third party” (quoted in Hern 2016). The responsibility for protecting personal privacy by keeping up with changes to conditions of use lies squarely with the user, not the company that collects and uses the information.

Moves to enact regulation of the commercialised digital domain are a necessary but insufficient counter to the power of the digital majors, insufficient because they leave their underlying business logic and world view unchallenged. Only public service broadcasting has the institutional purchase and ubiquitous presence in everyday life (in Europe, at least) to provide a viable basis for a cultural commons able to provide a comprehensive alternative and demonstrate how digital technologies can be deployed to reinvigorate and extend the ideal of citizenship in digitally networked societies.

The promise and compromise of the digital commons

In searching for indications of how this project might be pursued, developments at the BBC offer an instructive case study, although not because the Corporation is prototypical of PSB more generally. On the contrary, it is because the BBC is unique in being shaped by a distinctive history and enjoys advantages not always granted to other PSB organisations. This case of relative failure in recent attempts to build a comprehensive digital commons points up the difficulties this project faces with particular clarity.

From 2008 until 2016, when he left to direct the digital strategy of the New York Public Library, arguments in favour of the BBC taking the lead role in developing a digital commons were put with particular force and flair by the Corporation's Controller of Archive Development, Tony Ageh. He proposed the creation of a new Digital Public Space that would co-ordinate the "ever growing library of permanently available media and data held on behalf of the public by our enduring institutions: Our museums and libraries; our public service broadcasters (all of them); our public archives; government services" (Ageh 2015) and make this "vast archival wealth of nations – our Collective Abundance – here in Europe and well beyond, accessible" (Ageh 2012: 9).

The Google Arts and Culture domain, which is a partnership with over 1,200 leading museums and archives, already offers elements of this vision. Why, then, should public service broadcasters enter into competition? The answer is because they also make programmes that can play a key role in sparking viewers' initial interest and providing points of entry into the wealth of associated materials online. Programming can be organised into series and seasons that foster cumulative engagement, and tap into communities of interest that can be mobilised to contribute ideas and materials. This dynamic collaborative potential was central to Ageh's vision of a digital space that would be "freely available for anyone to use for research or for amusement, for discovery or for debate, for creative endeavour or simply for the pleasure of watching, listening or reading" (Ageh 2015) and "encourage and even require contributions from the whole of our society... a place where conversation thrives, where all contributions are welcomed and where every story, no matter who tells it, has value" (Ageh 2012: 9).

A variant of this vision, relabelled as Ideas Service, was incorporated into a manifesto for change (titled *British, Bold and Creative*) that the BBC issued in 2015 in the debate around charter renewal. The manifesto envisaged bringing "together what the BBC does across arts, culture, science, history and ideas and add to it work done by many of this country's most respected arts, culture and intellectual institutions", thereby creating "an online platform that, working with partners, would provide the gold standard in accuracy, breadth, depth, debate and revelation". In practice, "it would offer audiences the thrill of discovery and the reassurance of reliability" together with opportunities to share, curate and mutate material and participate in collective projects (BBC 2015: 70).

Ageh left the BBC voicing regret at the institution's lack of progress, noting "I told them they have to shape this challenge, the internet, before it shapes you" but "every-

thing I told the BBC to do they didn't understand or do" (quoted in Kiss 2016). Caution is partly due to bureaucratic resilience and partly to intellectual property constraints. But those difficulties are negotiable. More intractable are pressures exerted by shifts in PSB's operating environment. The British government discussion paper that was issued to canvass views on the renewal of the BBC Charter only invited respondents to consider whether, "Given the vast choice that audiences now have there is an argument that the BBC might become more focused on a narrower, core set of services" (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2015: 23). There was no equivalent question of whether there was a case for expanding BBC services. On the contrary, successive British governments have been in the forefront of efforts to pressure public cultural institutions to share resources with commercial companies. The BBC is now required to "leverage its size and scale to enhance and bolster the creative industry sector by working more in productive partnership with players of all sizes so others can benefit more extensively from its expertise and reputation" (DCMS 2016: 6).

The BBC announced plans for developing co-operative relations in its *Culture UK* manifesto in April 2017. It focuses on links with major arts organisations and emphasises creating landmark national events that would offer 'festivals of Britain', which represents a relative retreat to the safe ground of legitimated cultural forms that have traditionally formed the paternalistic bedrock of the BBC's construction of national culture and falls somewhat short of Ageh's vision of a collaborative space hospitable to grass roots creativity. There are problems, too, with the BBC's plans for more 'personalised' forms of delivery. In 2016, the Corporation announced the launch of a new app called BBC+ that will direct selections of programming to smartphone and tablet screens by selecting "content [that] users are likely to be interested in based on the categories they chose on sign up and what they have previously watched or listened to" (quoted in Jackson 2016). This adopts strategies favoured by commercial operators by erecting digital self-enclosures. It suggests a worrisome willingness to accept a logic that runs directly counter to the ambition of placing public service broadcasting at the heart of a networked public commons.

The new centrality accorded to smartphones as the point of contact with audiences flags up another major issue that has so far received far less attention than it merits in debates on the future of public service media (PSM): its environmental impacts.

Destructive technologies

Measurements for global average near-surface temperatures (a metre above ground level) have confirmed that 2016 overtook 2015 as the warmest year on record since 1850. Fully 90 per cent of the increase is attributable to high levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, levels not seen for 4 million years (Met Office 2017). The consequences are far reaching with "climate-related extremes such as heat waves, heavy precipitation and droughts increasing in frequency and intensity" disrupting food

production, aiding the spread of diseases previously confined to the tropics, and accelerating species extinctions (European Environmental Agency 2017: 12). Digital media are contributing to these negative environmental impacts in two significant ways; as primary drivers of intensified general consumption, and as assemblies of infrastructure and machines that rely on the extraction of rare metals and resources in their manufacture, consume substantial amounts of energy in their production and use, and are replaced at ever accelerating rates, further exacerbating problems of waste and pollution (Brevini & Murdock 2017).

The pivotal role played by advertising-supported digital media is deepening the commercial colonisation of online culture, and thereby the negative environmental impacts of intensified and accelerating consumption. This supports the case for developing PSM that should stand outside the system fuelling hyper consumption. In doing so, PSM acquires both added social value and added urgency. But this still leaves pressing questions around equipment and devices used in producing and accessing content, and the infrastructures that support these activities. Academic and professional commentary alike tends to set aside any sustained consideration of the infrastructures and devices that underpin communication. Questions around technology are too often presented as mainly technical issues, the specialist province of engineers and computer scientists. They are not. The choices make urgent many issues related to control, exploitation, and environmental damage. Smartphones are a poignant illustration.

The famously stylish facade of an Apple iPhone conceals a history of intensified depletion of scarce resources, continuing exploitation of the 'offshore' labour involved in assembly, and exacerbated contributions to waste and pollution generated by accelerated rates of disposal. Consumers are encouraged to look forward to the launch of the next iPhone, but discouraged from asking what has happened to all the previous versions that have been discarded. The conversion of telecommunication networks from public utilities to privatised companies, and the digital majors' construction of their own proprietary networks, is presented as a self-evident extension of consumer choice. Questions of who controls these key supports of our digital environment, how they plan to use them, and what environmental penalties may be incurred are buried under the weight of corporate promotion.

Once recovered, however, the social and environmental costs of foundational technologies present advocates of a digital broadcast commons with an acute moral dilemma. Sean Cubitt has clarified this in pointing out that no popular platform for innovation can stake an ethical claim to equity and universality "so long as the infrastructure that would permit it is founded on the integral wastes of finite resources" and the labour entailed in producing and maintaining it is exploited (Cubitt 2017: 168). Any proposal for developing PSM as the hub of a digital commons must therefore address, as a matter of urgency, not only issues of access, representation and accountability posed by the organisation of its core activities, but also dilemmas raised by the production systems and environmental impacts associated with the infrastructures and equipment on which these activities depend.

Mountain climbing

The preceding discussion has sketched key challenges facing advocates of PSM as the hub for an open digital commons that plays an essential and unique role in sustaining the health and well-being of life in a networked society. We now turn to possible ways of addressing these challenges, and do so in three broad areas: contents, operating systems, and devices and infrastructures.

Content

The first and most fundamental precondition for a digital commons is that it should refuse any form of advertising and product promotion. This, in turn, entails a concerted defence of adequate public funding for PSM.

Secondly, PSM should provide a single point of entry to the full range of resources held by public cultural institutions (museums, libraries, galleries, universities, performance spaces, and archives) and voluntary organisations and dedicated enthusiasts. The priority is to construct a comprehensive national digital network that links collections that illuminate national experience from different, and contested, perspectives. In planning programme production, every opportunity should be taken to mobilise what appears on the screen as a point of entry and a stimulus for audiences to access and use the full range of relevant digital resources available in the network.

Thirdly, audiences should be enlisted as active contributors, collaborating on shared projects and encouraged to create new artefacts that can be added to the shared archive. This does not mean professional expertise and judgement are downgraded. As recent experiences with YouTube and Facebook make clear, opening up to vernacular contributions requires developed procedures for moderating and curating on the basis of transparent criteria. These will always be open to dispute, but debate about boundaries is healthy and must be conducted in public – not behind closed doors.

Fourth and finally, any information participants provide about themselves should be retained only if they have given prior consent in the full knowledge of how the data will be accessed and used. And no personal information should be passed to a third party.

Operating Systems

On the basis of the argument I have developed, we can identify two essential features of the systems needed to organise access and use in a comprehensive digital commons. These are network architectures and navigational aids.

Any project aspiring to build a digital commons must adhere to Berners-Lee's aim of maximising openness by refusing temptations to develop personalised 'apps' or material for Facebook. In addition, it must lend full and unreserved support to the principle of net neutrality which accords equal status to all traffic moving across the Web, regardless of origin. There is a concerted push by some commercial operators to claim privileged status for their productions, to create an expressway and relegating

other users, including public cultural organisations, to slower minor ‘roads’. There is a clear public interest in resisting all moves in this direction. The Web should be seen as a public utility providing a universal service

There is little value, however, in assembling a comprehensive repository of informational and cultural resources if users cannot easily locate what they need. This requires navigational aid. At present, Web searches are monopolised almost entirely by Google which ranks sites according to the number of connections they attract. There are two problems with this. Firstly, it elevates popularity over social value. Secondly, it can be ‘gamed’ to move sites up in ranking. Since most searchers only view the first two pages displayed, these manipulations deliver considerable commercial gains. For both reasons, this system is not useful for navigating the digital commons. Solving this requires a public navigation engine that ranks sites on the basis of social value (see Andejevic 2013). This inevitably entails difficult judgements. In the spirit of openness, these need to be made on a basis that is both transparent and contestable, and in the full recognition that in many areas there will be plural, conflicting and possibly irreconcilable positions. This once again underlines the unique advantages of public media’s ability to link Web resources to programming that introduces issues, evaluates evidence, and gives space to contending perspective as a stimulus for viewers to embark on their own online explorations.

In a further practical endorsement of the core commons principles of openness and collaboration projects, developing a digital commons should, wherever possible, employ open source software to organise operating systems.

Devices and infrastructures

In contrast to the above, there are no viable alternatives to the commercial equipment used to produce, access and use broadcast and online resources. This inevitably implicates public media in chains of manufacture and disposal that make confronting issues of labour exploitation and environmental damage imperative. There are two possible responses. In the short term, public media professionals can introduce policies based on clear social and environmental criteria for all equipment they purchase for their own use. Their institutional centrality offers an opportunity to establish a ‘gold standard’ for procurement across all public organisations, purchasing only from companies that meet agreed standards.

Historically, public broadcasters have played a central role in pioneering innovations in communication media. In collaboration with universities and other public agencies, PSM should intervene in shaping how emerging technological possibilities can be employed to advance social inclusion and environmental sustainability. Otherwise, the development of 3-D printing, quantum computing, and artificial intelligence will be monopolised by the digital majors and applied to the ends they determine.

In short, they will own and operate the backbone features of the networked society. This prioritises the infrastructure that connects the network for a digital commons.

Over the last thirty years, telecommunications systems around the world have been converted from public utilities to commercial providers, making it increasingly difficult for governments to regulate pricing levels and standards of service. Regulation has repeatedly failed to guarantee universal and equal access. Recent figures in Britain, for example, reveal continuing inequalities by both age and social class. In 2016, almost half (47 per cent) of those over 74 years of age, and more than a quarter (26 per cent) of those unemployed or in routine manual occupations, had no internet access at home. In stark contrast, 94 per cent of those in professional and managerial groups had home access (Ofcom 2017). The price of connectivity is not the only reason for persistent ‘digital divides’, but it is a major factor for low-income households. Unequal access to the internet has fundamental implications for PSM’s core principle of ensuring universality. Unless infrastructure is addressed, any move to develop a digital commons would cement a two-tier service, giving “those with access an enhanced service compared to those without” (Ramsey 2013: 875). Reconstituting essential telecommunications links as publically regulated utilities with price controls and cross-subsidies from affluent to poorer users is an essential first step in equalising opportunities. It would not be sufficient in itself, but without it any proposal to create the universally accessible digital commons will deliver less than it promises.

These requirements for reclaiming public service media as the essential hub of a new digital commons is formidable and situated against a backdrop of an economic orthodoxy that continues to promote commercial expansion at the expense of public value. My view and recommendations may appear hopelessly utopian. But the choices that I have presented cannot be avoided. The digital majors already play a commanding role in determining how we access the Web and what we find there. They are the vanguard shaping the communications environment crystallising around the next generation of digital technologies. As a matter of great urgency, we need to challenge their visions of the future and construct practical proposals for developing a digital commons that is informed by values of openness, diversity, equal entitlement, and ecological responsibility – core values for public service media in a networked society.

It is a daunting mountain to climb, but as successful attempts to scale peaks that were previously thought unconquerable demonstrate, a combination of preparedness, persistence and collaboration can achieve the seemingly impossible.

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Public Service in the Age of Social Network Media

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Abstract

This chapter addresses how, and to what extent, public service obligations and institutions may be redefined and extended to facilitate information flows and public deliberation using social network media as a remedy for democratic deficiencies of both older mass media and newer forms of network media. I make a case for three public service functions that have particular importance in social network media: curation, moderation, and monitoring. Building on a critique of the individualistic perspective underlying both cyber-optimist and -pessimist accounts of the potentials of social network media, an alternative and institutional perspective based on mediatization theory is introduced. I focus on the ongoing restructuring of societal spheres through which strategic and sociable forms of communication are challenging deliberative forms of communication. Based on recent studies on public service media's use of social network media in efforts to enhance public deliberation, the chapter examines how networked media can be a focus for intervention in the public interest.

Keywords: curation, cyber-optimism, democratic deliberation, mediatization, moderation, monitoring

Introduction

Social network media such as Facebook and Twitter have become increasingly important means by which citizens learn about public issues; they have also been praised as platforms for individuals and organisations to engage in deliberations on private and public affairs. Their growing importance is evident, for example, in a series of digital media reports published annually by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. The latest (2016) reports extensive use of social network media for news consumption. In countries with very high internet penetration, such as Denmark and Sweden, no fewer than 56 per cent of the population reported using social network media as a news source during the past week, and 12 per cent considered social network media their most important source. Among 18-24 year olds, the percentage is typically much

higher, as in Denmark where 30 per cent of young people said social network media are their primary sources for news. In the USA and across the EU as a whole, at least 10 per cent of the population indicate social network media as their primary source (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism 2016; see also Schröder et al. 2017). This shift is motivating legacy news media, including public service media (PSM) organisations, to transform their news services (and other programme genres) to accommodate changing user behaviours (Sehl et al. 2017).

Social network media have been praised for their potential to boost participation in public affairs, both as fora for discussion and as tools for political action. Their role in mobilising people during the Arab Spring and in the Occupy Movement is offered as evidence of their potential. But the optimistic tone of discourse about Web 2.0 and social network media's presumed ability to facilitate citizen participation in public debates, and to communicate information that is both relevant and sufficient among users, is increasingly questioned. There is growing concern that fewer people engage with a comprehensive range of information, which is important for opinion formation. Public deliberation may be jeopardised by the compartmentalisation of publics into cliques of like-minded individuals as 'polarized crowds' (Smith et al. 2014) who participate in 'filter bubbles' (Pariser 2011). Such concerns are also linked with growth in strategic communication practices that instrumentalise public deliberation (Morozov 2011; Curran et al. 2012) and produce manipulative content and false information spread through social media networks.

This chapter discusses the role of PSM in relation to social network media in pursuit of improved understandings of the notion and reality of a 'networked society'. I consider how, and to what extent, PSM may extend their democratic service obligations by facilitating improved information flows and public deliberations through social network media in efforts to remedy the historic problem of democratic deficiencies in mass media and the current democratic problems of social network media. Discussion about public service obligations relative to the rise of digitalisation has emphasised both opportunities and potential threats to public service broadcasting (PSB). This encourages reconsidering their remit in an era of digital networks, especially with regard to how they might survive in an increasingly global, commercial and convergent media environment (e.g. Lowe & Yamamoto 2016).

In this chapter, however, our point of departure is not from the perspective of the PSM organisations, although they will become the focus as we proceed. Here the point is to consider challenges and possibilities of social media for sustaining an informed citizenry in the deliberation of public affairs. That is central to the theory and practice of public service in media, and therefore pertinent to understandings of PSM in the networked society context. In other words, I am largely dealing with functions rather than organisations, but both are rooted in public service principles.

From an academic perspective, the colloquial term 'social media' can be construed as a misnomer because it suggests that such media are especially social and, by implication at least, more social than other media (Papacharissi 2015). In fact, all media

are inherently social in nature and function. The distinctive characteristic of the new platforms, especially Twitter and Facebook, is their ability to create social *networks* of communication instead of one-to-one or one-to-many forms of transmission-oriented communication (Ellison & Boyd 2013). But that doesn't mean that traditional media such as the telephone or radio are less social than 'social media'. Thus, the term 'social network media' is more precise (Klastrup 2016) and therefore more useful for our analysis.

Social network media clearly have a role in the dissemination of publicly relevant information and in facilitating participation in public affairs, but they are insufficient for these purposes in their present form because they are weak in social commitments and civic virtues. In social network media, the 'social' aspect is dominated by particular forms of sociality that have not so far involved direct responsibility towards the public or society at large. Their combined commercial and socio-technical nature therefore favours some dimensions of 'the social', most notably sociability and strategic forms of communication, but largely excludes broader societal goals that are related to enlightenment and democracy. This is also due to the fact that the global tech companies controlling social network media platforms have refused to consider themselves as media having editorial responsibilities and insist on being treated as distribution technology companies.

PSB was invented in the context of radio and television's emergence in the first half of the twentieth century as an approach to ensure realising the greatest public benefit from the new media technologies of that era. This is a timely period for deeper consideration of how social network media in the twenty-first century may similarly be subject to policy intervention to secure the greatest benefits in the public interest. PSM's roots in broadcasting provide a legacy of experiences and tools for addressing the important issues and concerns today, although we should be wary of trying to replicate past experience under different conditions when working to address contemporary problems. It is especially important not to imply that a call for public service in social network media should be solely, or even mainly, governed by the self-interested rationale of public service organisations in their efforts to survive in the digital era. This chapter focuses on the need for public intervention in the development of social network media to compensate for existing and persistent social and democratic deficiencies in the converging media environment.

Networks of optimism and pessimism

Discussions about social and democratic benefits of social network media often feature a tone of cyber-optimism concerning the internet's potential to influence an individual's possibilities for self-expression and participation, and a general enthusiasm for the emergence of 'networks' to replace an antiquated 'mass society'. In considering the potential social network media have for satisfying public service

obligations, we should critically examine, and deconstruct, the cyber-optimistic vision. In turn, we also need to do the same with cyber-pessimistic ideals about social network media.

In a study of US digital media pioneers, Turner (2006) found that the revolutionary fervour over cybernetic technologies has roots in ideas that were borrowed from the counterculture of the 1960s. The rise of Web 2.0 and social network media are usually considered the next step in an evolutionary process that is producing a networked society, now signalling a widening and deepening of potentiality ushered in by Web 1.0. Cyber-optimists such as Nicholas Negroponte (1995), co-founder of the MIT Media Lab, and American poet John Perry Barlow (1996), author of *A Declaration for Cyberspace Independence*, envisaged human emancipation through digital network outside or beyond the capacity of nation states and institutionalised authorities to govern. Across techno-optimistic publications, one finds a peculiar blend of ideas adapted from libertarianism, communitarianism, and anarchism in which ideals about social governance in 'cyberspace' are based on voluntary agreements among networked individuals. This cyber-optimistic view has informed political action in the Occupy Movement, for example, and serves as a normative foundation for research on the social influences and potential of digital networks.

A recent prominent example is *Networked* by Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman (2014). Here, the authors argue that networks are "the new social operating system" based on the notion of 'networked individualism' that positions the individual and the network as the two most prominent social entities in a 'networked world': "In the world of networked individuals, it is the person who is the focus: not the family, not the work unit, not the neighbourhood, and not the social group" (Rainie & Wellman 2014: 6). From this perspective, collective demands and obligations towards other social entities are mainly construed as obstacles to the emancipation of the individual. Historic barriers to shared social prosperity seem less important if the individual acquires the competence to develop his or her network to pursue personal prosperity, which is presumably shared in so far as every individual seizes the opportunities presumably entailed. They believe the networked world "provides opportunities for people to thrive if they know how to manoeuvre in it. Arguably, the emerging divide in this world is not the 'digital divide' but the 'network divide'" (ibid: 255).

Rainie and Wellman provide an interesting analysis of the ways in which the internet and mobile media combine with already changing patterns of social organisation in signalling a shift from formal and close-knit organisations to looser and networked forms of association. This is thought to facilitate new structures of social organisation and communicative interaction. However, they tend to overemphasise digital technology's liberating potential and demonstrate a limited understanding of the constraints that are structural and institutional. Furthermore, theirs is a highly individualistic perspective in which social ties – and associated obligations and dependencies – are primarily seen as barriers to individual freedom and personal fulfilment.

Thus, digital networks have inspired optimistic prognoses of societal development. They have also prompted critical and pessimistic diagnoses of the social consequences of new media technology, for instance as regards social media surveillance (Trotter 2012) and the emergence of filter bubbles (Pariser 2011). Sherry Turkle (2011: 1) criticised the ways in which digital media encourage socially and psychologically unrewarding relationships and dependencies: “Our networked life allows us to hide from each other, even as we are tethered to each other. We’d rather text than talk”. Her analysis suggests there is little self-fulfilment to be had through the internet or mobile media. Instead, individuals submit themselves to activities and relationships that are exhausting and divert them from engaging in potentially far more rewarding social experiences.

It is interesting that although Rainie and Wellman (2014) and Turkle (2011) reach opposite conclusions, they do not disagree on the actual changes taking place. Both highlight a proliferation of weaker forms of social ties, which allow individuals to disembed (Giddens 1984) from socially stronger ties. They present different normative evaluations of the implications, however: Rainie and Wellman (2014) emphasise constraints of ‘the cocoon’ of bounded groups, while Turkle (2011) emphasises social pressures accompanying digital media’s demand for the individual to be in perpetual contact with an extended network. When applied to our interests here, the two positions present radically different solutions for PSM in their engagement with social network media.

If the cyber-optimists are correct, the new online environment may render PSM superfluous as users take an active role in being their own educators and facilitators of public debate. If the cyber-pessimists are correct, PSM should develop online activities outside social network media, if possible. Most problematic for PSM, from a sociological perspective, is the individualistic perspective which neglects social demands and collective obligations. That orientation is questionable given the absence of a structural perspective that necessarily brings into consideration the wider cultural contexts and deep social institutional frameworks within which social network media operate. Lacking this perspective, one cannot qualify either diagnosis – i.e. optimistic or pessimistic. Both diagnoses direct attention to real opportunities and actual problems, but the experience of having new opportunities and/or being subjected to new demands depend on social variables that certainly include the individual’s social and cultural background (class, age, gender, etc.), the institutional context of media use (business, education, entertainment, politics, etc.), and the dominant logic of the media in question (commercial, political, professional, etc.). Thus, a structural and institutional perspective is *necessary* for deciding *under which conditions* each and both diagnoses may be correct (or incorrect). This directs our inquiry into the role of PSM in a different direction.

Mediatization: Networks of social change

Mediatization theory provides a necessary holistic perspective on interdependencies between media and wider culture and societal conditions (Hjarvard 2013; Lundby 2014). This perspective shifts attention from communicative processes of ‘mediation’ (the use of various media for communication) to social processes of ‘mediatization’ (changes brought about in the wider culture and society due to the growing presence and importance of media). Most research has typically located media influence at the level of communication processes, as evident in the considerable body of work on how media messages can persuade audiences or set the public agenda. Although an important aspect of media’s influence, the taken-for-granted presence of media across an expanding range of domains of cultural and social life renders this perspective insufficient. Mediatization theory emphasises the integration of various media into the very fabric of culture and society as an important influence in and of itself (Hjarvard 2017a). Media have become integral to the functioning of many aspects and most domains of society, including politics (Esser & Strömbäck 2015), religion (Hjarvard & Lövheim 2012), and sports (Frandsen 2015). Media consequently exert influence from inside society as indispensable tools for social interactions.

The mediatization of culture and society has a diachronic dimension and a synchronic dimension. It is diachronic because mediatization is a *historical and transformative process* through which other societal domains become increasingly dependent on the media and their *modus operandi*. For example, journalism and news media exercise important influences on ways of ‘doing politics’ today, not just in formatting political messages. Today, media are present in all levels of society from ‘the big society’ level of dominant societal institutions such as politics and public administration, to ‘the small society’ level of myriad life-world encounters between individuals and groups in informal social settings. They have become a natural resource for ‘doing family’, ‘doing work’, ‘doing sports’, etc.

The synchronic dimension of mediatization highlights the ways in which media have come to *condition social interaction*. Media logics co-structure the ways in which individuals, groups and organisations interact, not as a determining factor but precisely as a conditioning factor that *enables, limits, and co-structures* social interaction. ‘Media logics’ is pluralised to indicate there is not a singular logic behind all media. Mediatization investigates the varied ways in which technology, aesthetics, and the institutional dimensions of media exert a combined influence on broad cultural and social affairs (Hjarvard 2017b). Mediatization research is not an attempt to build a closed theoretical fortress to replace existing theory. It is properly understood as an attempt to provide a synthesising perspective that should include insights from existing research, including political economy of the media (Murdock 2017) and public sphere theory (Habermas 1989) especially. Political economy is important because social network media feature a global and commercial model that is subject to limited political regulation. The former mass media structure was based on a national and

mixed public-private model with variable degrees, often high, of domestic political intervention. Public sphere theory is especially important because Jürgen Habermas' study of the structural transformation of the public sphere may be understood as a precursor to mediatization studies in his efforts to combine historical and sociological approaches to investigate the restructuring of societal spheres, which is exemplary of mediatization research.

From the perspective of mediatization theory, we should regard social network media as implicated in social and cultural changes that restructure institutions and social realms, including the public sphere at large and the organisational and technological frameworks that support the functioning of the public sphere in practice. In the Nordic countries, the public sphere has been underpinned by a combination of PSM institutions (originally monopolies) and private news media, largely commercial. But the public sphere in each country is increasingly influenced by global, commercial actors that especially include Facebook and Google. Through mediatization processes, existing institutional structures are being partly disrupted and reconfigured.

Dijck (2013) emphasises how social network media are engineering new forms of sociality by merging pre-existing life-world phenomena (e.g. 'friends' and rules of politeness) with algorithmic operating principles such as popularity rankings (based on 'likes', network size, etc.). This restructuring of social interaction involves a blurring of earlier boundaries between public and private forms of communication, as well as between strategic and non-strategic forms. On Facebook, much communication has a half-private, half-public character. What one learns about public affairs through Facebook is knowledge communicated in a modality of sociable conversations within a personal network of close and distant acquaintances.

Thus, the logics of social network media differ from the logics of mass media (Klinger & Svensson 2015). Dijck and Pool (2013) highlight four social network media logics: programmability, popularity, connectivity, and datafication. In their view, these are operating principles that not only influence interactions on social network media but are increasingly entangled with mass media logics. As mass media and social network media converge in many aspects, e.g. technically, commercially and through daily use, the logics of different (or formerly different) media become intertwined and interdependent. This entanglement of logics is clearly at work in the sharing of news from professional media, including PSM's news services, through social network media. From the user's perspective, the sharing of news is part of an everyday social conversation with 'friends'. From the news media's perspective, producing shareable news has become a strategic priority. The success or failure of a news item to gain traction on social network media has been internalised as a new 'quality' benchmark in newsrooms. In the logics of social network media, news media content and user activity are both integral to the business model.

The entanglement of life-world norms of interaction, the logics of news media, and the logics of social network media creates a new context for engaging with public affairs. The ways in which people share and discuss news on social network media are

influenced by this hybrid social environment, which is partly public and partly private. Marwick and Boyd (2010) believe this environment is characterised by a ‘context collapse’ that makes unclear what kind of social situation the user is engaging in. We are describing a fluid situation with repercussions for the ways in which people engage with news and discuss things. This represents a significant challenge for PSM, and other traditional legacy news media, because social network media are not only new competitors, potentially diminishing their historic capture of audiences, income and political legitimacy, but also represent a new way of constructing ‘publicness’ when compared with how this was done in the broadcast era. The techno-social infrastructure of the public sphere is gradually shifting and, as a result, PSM must consider how to engage citizens in public matters under new networked conditions.

The place *not* to discuss controversial issues

Given the purported democratic potential of social network media to engage people in dialogue about issues of common concern and public interest, several studies have shown that social network media are not always suitable for such discussions. This is especially the case for controversial issues. A Pew Research Centre (2014) study in America found that people are less willing to discuss controversial issues on social network media compared to offline situations, i.e., at the family dinner table, work, or a public community meeting. The study further documents that “social media did not provide new forums for those who might otherwise remain silent to express their opinions and debate issues” (Pew Research Centre 2014: 4).

The Danish Agency of Culture (2015) conducted a comparable study in Denmark and came to similar conclusions. Only 6 per cent of Danes would be ‘very willing’ to discuss controversial issues on social network media, compared to 12 per cent who would be ‘very willing’ to do so at a public meeting. Fully 25 per cent would be ‘very willing’ to discuss such issues at work, and 38 per cent at the family dinner table. A recent Norwegian study regarding citizens’ willingness to discuss the publication of controversial religious cartoons concluded that social network media are not a preferred arena for most people to discuss such issues (Fladmoe & Steen-Johnsen 2017). Thus, the idea that social network media are a public communicative space for an otherwise ‘silent majority’ appears generally to be incorrect.

Reluctance to express controversial opinions has been described as a ‘spiral of silence’ effect (Noelle-Neumann 1993). The more one expects other people to disagree (or feels unsure of their opinions), the less willing s/he is to discuss controversial issues. Social network media are potentially more likely to reinforce majority positions in a debate because people with a minority viewpoint are more likely to refrain from voicing a contrary opinion. This reluctance triggers a spiral of silence because the lack of dissenting voices leads like-minded participants to believe their viewpoints are more widely, generally shared than true. The spiral of silence is not specific to

social network media; it is a feature of all kinds of communication situations. If we want to explain people's reluctance to discuss controversial issues on social network media, we need additional explanatory factors. I will discuss two here, and there are likely others.

The aforementioned 'context collapse' creates an ambiguous social situation that makes other participants' potential reactions less predictable, including uncertainty about to whom one is actually speaking in social network media. The spiral of silence effect may thus become more prominent on social network media because the platform and context encourages users to save face in the eyes of 'friends' with a variety of backgrounds and relationships with the user. The algorithmic push by Facebook and other social network media to enlarge the user's network typically makes them not only bigger but also more heterogeneous, thereby increasing the likelihood of context collapse. A study by Storsul (2014) supports the influence of this on political engagement among (even) youth politicians in Norway who often use social network media to organise political events. The evidence indicates they were reluctant to express themselves politically on Facebook. Moreover, the mixed social context in this environment "causes teenagers to delimit controversies and try to keep political discussions to groups with more segregated audiences" (ibid: 17). Thus, the first factor is that social network media are as likely to aggravate the spiral of silence problem as potentially rectify it.

The second factor explaining limited interest to use social network media for public deliberation of controversial issues is the at-times harsh climate of online debate, which includes 'flaming' behaviour and outright hate speech. This pertains to social network media and other online fora, including online comments for news media sites. If people experience hate speech online, this understandably has a detrimental effect on their willingness to participate in debates (Fladmoe & Nadim 2017). Lacking actual hate speech, the very harshness of tone that is characteristic in many online debates may deter people from speaking out in such fora.

There are complicated implications for PSM. If PSM facilitates online debates on their own websites or via social network media platforms such as Facebook, they may have a civilising influence on debate through the practice of moderation. But this poses challenges for PSM organisations because they must accommodate themselves to the more liberal norms of conversational etiquette compared to established editorial practices in broadcasting. There is also the problem of courting accusations they are curtailing freedom of speech, particularly pointed for a 'public service' media organisation. The opportunities and challenges are rather closely 'balanced', which indicates the complexity of the problem for PSM in particular.

Social network media's deficiencies must be compared with mass media in particular. Opportunity to participate in public deliberation is more constrained in mass media, and many people are unwilling to participate even when asked to do so. They don't want to be in the public spotlight. On the other hand, questions about whether equal access enables representation of diverse viewpoints, and about the role

of moderation in discussions to ensure the quality of debates, are of equal relevance in mass media and social network media. However, compared with mass media, the internet and social network media *per se* are suggested as arenas that are inherently more democratic, more inclusive, and more likely to give voice to people who would otherwise be unlikely to express their opinions. Reviewing the evidence, none of these claims seem to be true. This doesn't necessarily inhibit the use of social network media for deliberation of issues of public concern, but their ability to fulfil such functions does not derive from the 'nature' of social network media. It can only be derived from obligations they are expected to fulfil in the service of society. This is where PSM has an important role to play in the era of social network media – a role with functions of historic and continuing importance.

Using social network media in the public's service

To illustrate the potential benefit of public service obligations for the democratic performance of social network media, we draw on two recent analyses conducted with Mattias Pape Rosenfeldt (Hjarvard & Rosenfeldt 2017, forthcoming). We studied the public debates following two television series about Islam, immigration and cultural values in Denmark. The programmes were aired by the Danish public service broadcaster, DR, and debates took place in both traditional mass media and on Facebook. The Mohammed cartoon crisis of 2005 and 2006 demonstrated that discussions about Islam, immigration and cultural values are often heated. This crisis was not an exception, but rather a particularly intense episode in a debate that began in the 1980s and continues to have political traction, especially given the 2015 European refugee crises and an upsurge of populist movements.

Many analyses of media coverage of immigration and Islam have demonstrated that news media generally provide a critical and even negative image of both, particularly of immigrants with Muslim backgrounds who are often associated with crime, terrorism, unemployment, and gender discrimination (see Hervik 2002; Jacobsen et al. 2013). Respective news stories may be factually correct, but the cumulative effect indicates a media agenda that singles out 'Muslim immigrants' as a key problem. This can create a deep divide between the majority 'us' and a minority, 'them', which may prove detrimental to integration efforts and actually alienate immigrants. It may deter them from participating in public discussions about issues related to their own political and cultural life in the host society. This situation has become increasingly acute with the resurgence of populist movements that typically target Muslim immigrants as the root cause of many societal problems.

Against this backdrop of contentious conflicts, we wished to address the potential for not only engaging with the issues but actually trying to make a difference by altering how the debate is framed and engaging immigrants in the discussions. In particular, we wished to follow the debate across a range of media, including Facebook. We

examined public debates surrounding two very different types of television series. One was a comedy show titled *Still Veiled* (2013) that featured four women with an ethnic minority background who make fun of the prejudices and stereotypes of both the majority population and Muslim minority communities. The other was a factual documentary titled *Rebellion from the Ghetto* (2015) that addressed generational problems between ethnic minority youths and their parents over marriage, sexuality, homosexuality, etc. Both programmes were commissioned by DR and produced by private production companies, and both prompted debates in mainstream media (radio, newspapers, etc.) and social network media.

The results of our analyses (Hjarvard & Rosenfeldt 2017, forthcoming) show that the debates provided a wide array of framings of the various issues, and partly transcended the 'us versus them' dichotomy that has been characteristic in mainstream news media. Furthermore, people of ethnic minority backgrounds were very active in the debates, both on social network media and in mainstream media. Benchmarked against the traditional ratio of representation for ethnic minority voices in news media coverage, they played a prominent role. In doing so, they made publicly visible a diversity of positions among ethnic minorities in Denmark. That this happened was the result of conscious and combined efforts by DR and the private production companies. By consciously downplaying particular framings and not singling out a definitive cause for problems, they fostered a more diverse debate and more voices felt invited to participate. For instance, problems were not framed as religious issues but as cultural and generational problems with which people could identify irrespective of religious orientation.

The documentary series, especially, made conscious efforts in planning the debate through a number of pre-screenings of the programme in particular social settings (e.g. schools with high percentages of ethnic minority students). Ethnic minority opinion leaders were invited to see the series and comment in advance. This initial priming of key audiences provided a different point of departure for the debate when the series was subsequently broadcast on public television. Debates were intense and there was no lack of fierce rhetoric, but the professional moderation of official Facebook pages for the TV series ensured a reasonable level of civility. In addition, participation was robust because debates involved many people from the various ethnic communities. Debate preparations and moderation alone would not have ensured a more diverse debate, but happily several other mainstream media followed DR by making space for more diverse voices and thereby helping debates develop in line with the programmes' overall aims.

The two case studies demonstrate that social network media, despite various deficiencies we have discussed, can be an arena for public discussion about serious and contentious issues in ways that expand argumentation and involve new people rather than foment a spiral of silence. This presupposes that PSM is knowledgeable about how to make the most of social network media's potential. Importantly, it also suggests this works in *conjunction* with their legacy mass media professional repertoire. The

studies indicate that PSM should not think of social media in isolation but rather as part of a wider, converging media infrastructure in which PSM *and other media* jointly influence information flows and debates that unfold in and between various media. PSM may, therefore, have an important role to play outside their traditional realm, a role that is keenly relevant to the networked society context. Finally, it is important to observe that without the obligations and resources that pertain to PSM in particular, the debates we observed would have been unlikely to occur and develop as they did.

Public service obligations for social network media

In light of my critique, I want to highlight three important public service tasks that PSM already perform that should be extended: curation, moderation and monitoring. *Curation* is important because the acquisition of quality content with public relevance is not only important for the performance of PSM per se but also necessary for information flows and public discussions on social network media overall. Social network media rely on their users to produce or share content from other sources and few users systematically generate quality content of public relevance. So, the various media industries play a vital role as providers of content as input. The analysed cases suggest it is unlikely that purely commercial media companies would have taken on such productions or committed themselves to raising public debates on these critical issues without DR taking the lead. Because such productions can be commercially unviable, it is important for initial agenda setting that they are resourced and aired by a prominent broadcaster with the strength to market the programmes and the capacity to accept higher degrees of risk. And without DR, it is unlikely they would have initiated significant debate.

Using curated content means PSM doesn't need to produce all of the content in-house; much can be achieved by commissioning and buying content in a commercial market. In the aforementioned cases, it is important to observe that both the broadcaster and the production company demonstrated commitment to public service values. This suggests that curating not only involves the curation of content *for* social network media, but also curation of content *within and by* social network media, taking advantage of the network's crowdsourcing capacity. The success of the two cases relied on PSM's ability to create synergy between traditional productions and online contributions.

Secondly, PSM plays a vital role through *moderation*. Social network media comprise many forms of communication and conversation. Sociability is a dominant form of conversation in which communication is performed primarily for enjoying company and affirming relationships. Another dominant form is strategic communication by which commercial and political interests seek to influence public opinion and behaviour, using online posts that mimic the sociable modality of communication between 'friends'. If social network media are to be valuable for discussing public concerns,

they must transcend the sociable and strategic forms of communication that are currently prevalent. As Schudson (1997) persuasively argued, conversation – including sociable conversation – is not inherently democratic but may be used for a variety of purposes: authoritarian or democratic, manipulative or deliberative. He argues that democratic conversations require a commitment to *publicness* and *civility*, and need a certain amount of *norm-governedness* to succeed. In short, democratic conversations on social network media platforms require moderation. This applies both in the limited sense of screening posts for hate speech and forward planning to ensure the quality of the debate by inviting relevant participants to join the conversation to ensure a plurality of voices and perspectives, etc. This suggests a contextualising role for PSM.

Finally, PSM can play a vital role in *monitoring*. Social network media can be a rich resource for a wide range of information that has private and public relevance, but the more significant they become as information distributors, the more important it becomes that this information flow is subject to scrutiny and quality control. In the wake of concerns about the rise of ‘fake news’, news media firms are strengthening fact-checking procedures, and political institutions are pushing social network media to introduce procedures for countering various forms of misinformation. Facebook, for example, announced initiatives for implementation prior to national elections in France and Germany (Kerr 2017), and from 2018 the German NetzDG law demands stricter scrutiny of hate speech and fake news on social network media. Such initiatives may be useful, but they should not be limited to news stories and passive damage control after publication. Public service media and other knowledge-processing institutions, such as universities, public institutions and NGOs, should take an active role as monitoring institutions that *validate* and *qualify* information and work to distinguish between *relevant* and less relevant information. An increased presence and active monitoring activity in the sphere of social network media would not only make it more difficult for questionable information to flourish, but also set standards for what is understood as valid information. This role would align with the traditional PSB obligation to serve as a benchmark for quality standards.

These three public service tasks are not restricted to PSM organisations, but they have comparatively unique knowledge and professional experience to take on these functions effectively today. And these three tasks provide a framework for advancing an agenda to enable citizens to better use social network media as resources for sharing and developing publicly relevant information and discussions about public issues. Social network media have the potential for this, but without democratic governance this potential can be circumvented by the spread of misinformation, spiral of silence effects, and commercial pressures.

A profound problem in relation to the idea of democratic governance is the global control that dominant tech companies such as Facebook and Google exercise in the field of social network media. National political regulation and the initiatives of national public service institutions have only limited reach and influence on the practices of the dominant players. Hitherto, policy measures at national levels have mostly been

reactive rather than proactive in relation to technological and business developments. There is clearly a need for supranational intervention to regulate the practices of big tech companies in the field of social network media, for instance at the level of the European Union. This far, the European Union seems to be one of the few supranational bodies that demonstrate some will to engage with the growing power of global tech companies. Nevertheless, national public service media and other organisations, including civil society groups working to strengthen the public interest in the media, can make a difference through conscious efforts to curate content, moderate discussions, and monitor social network media.

Through processes of mediatization – in conjunction with other processes that especially include globalisation and commercialisation – we are again experiencing a structural transformation of the public sphere (Habermas 1989). Social network media are restructuring relationships between personal, private, and public arenas, and between strategic, deliberative, and sociable forms of communication. Their growing importance as distributors of publicly relevant information and fora for public engagement makes it vital to subject them to public service obligations to ensure public interest benefits for societies as such. This mandate is natural for PSM due to historic, legal and institutional reasons, and therefore can be considered immediate, contemporary tasks that have essential importance for the role of PSM in the networked society.

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Digital Media Culture and Public Service Media in the Platform Era

Hermann Rotermund

Abstract

This chapter argues that a complete transformation to mature public service media institutions and strategies is necessary due to disruptive changes in global media structures producing a digital media culture (DMC). Broadcast enterprises are endangered by a generation rift and threatened with declining relevance and a minor role in online competition. Renewing their relevance requires abandoning the historic prioritisation of linearity and embracing interactivity in non-linear media production and operations. Building digital infrastructures for the production and distribution of linear programmes was accomplished and important, but can now be seen as an intermediary step in the continuing development of digital media culture. The future of public service media hinges on whether these organisations can be a proactive player in the digital media eco-system where the former privileges of heritage broadcasters will be dismantled or shared with other players. The author believes efforts in achieving this are uneven and, so far, too often ineffective.

Keywords: public value, media ecosystems, integrated mandate, digital disruption, digital transformation, media systems, linear and non-linear media

Introduction

This chapter provides a critique of the status and future prospects for public service media (PSM) in networked societies. In the German language, the term ‘digitale Medienkultur(en)’ is well-established at universities. It is useful for assessing the combination of technological, economic, political and cultural aspects. This concept accentuates technological development as a driving force in a process that is highly social. The analysis goes beyond a particular institution and its infrastructur(es), even when infrastructures are shared between actors. The closest equivalent in English is ‘eco-system’, a term borrowed from environmental sciences as an allegory for media as a kind of ecology of interconnected, interdependent and co-related elements. This term is problematic in important ways due to limitations in the allegory when applied to socially constructed environments. Thus, for the purposes of this chapter I will use

Rotermund, Hermann (2018). Digital Media Culture and Public Service Media in the Platform Era in Gregory Ferrell Lowe, Hilde Van den Bulck, Karen Donders (eds.) *Public Service Media in the Networked Society*. Göteborg: Nordicom.

the term ‘digital media culture’ (DMC) as a useful construct for approaching analysis of ‘networked societies’.

Disruption ahead

When dealing with prospects for the so-called network(ed) society, sociologists often stress the benefits of communication within and between international communities. Castells (1996) depicted the distribution of VCR technology and the spread of cable TV as signalling the end of mass audiences “in terms of simultaneity and uniformity of the message it receives” and its replacement with “segmented, differentiated audiences” (Castells 1996: 386). Castells envisioned the advancement of empowered individuals using interactive media instead of unidirectional mass media.

Eli Noam (1995) also emphasised individualisation as an effect of ‘cyber-TV’ featuring ‘me-channels’. As media markets undergo deep structural changes, competition over frequencies, channels and content is less the focus than competing for customer attention. Noam foresaw the rapid establishment of new players in a disruptive scenario and wondered if US productions would dominate in emerging global TV markets. Barely ten years later, he answered his question: “Internet TV will be strongly American” (Noam 2004: 242). Indeed, this characterises the global online video market in which Netflix and Amazon hold strong positions and are now launching regional in-house productions.

Thus, individualisation and globalisation have certainly proven true. Noam added a third expectation of new socialising effects. He hoped the shared mass audience television experience that once created a common bond could be recreated through cyber-TV by ‘telecommunities’ – which was not precisely defined. Early experience in cyberspace with the Usenet made the assumption of growing peer-to-peer relationships understandable. He could not have envisioned sharing as a commodity or the peer-to-peer intermediary platforms that are dominant today. Content is still important, certainly, but the intermediary who equalises all content is arguably king.

Over a period of more than twenty years, the emergence of digital infrastructures in broadcast media has been the defining tension in discussions about the future of PSM. While digital is new, the emphasis on broadcasting is not. The focus has been on a complex set of intertwined processes for adapting production, storage and distribution with significant consequences for workflows and employment. This focus is increasingly less useful, however, because broadcasting *per se* has declining relevance. Unfortunately, media regulation does not keep pace with the ongoing technical and market transformation that confronts PSM with unique insecurities regarding their position in future national and global media systems. Significantly, audiences behave differently today and younger generations (below the age of 45) are increasingly moving away from linear media in all Western societies. The prevalence of smartphones as mobile media devices is even permeating use by older generations, indicating the

growing scope and depth of disruption. This is accompanied by the danger that PSM will lose popular and political support.

The relevance of PSM, and other traditional providers of ‘quality media’ is at stake. Unless they can play as significant a role in online domains as they have in traditional media structures, they are likely to lose their historic importance in everyday life. They are still trusted today, but not used as much or as routinely as before. This should be of concern because the internet and its intermediary platforms offer a wide variety of topics and views but with the public service and social responsibility orientation that the traditional press and broadcasters privileged. The public sphere, which was already an ideal-type, is being segmented into opaque communication spheres without a common or shared agenda. The disruption process affects not only media but also essential structures of Western societies that include, for example, friendship, participation, sharing, transparency, and deliberation. All of this need to be re-defined under contemporary conditions of digital communication, digital economies and digital cultures. Discussion is needed about how far the disruption process in media systems has developed and how the present and future of PSM is affected – and with what implications. RIPE is about re-visionary interpretations of the public enterprise in media, and that is clearly necessary today.

By the numbers

A brief reflection on several significant numbers is helpful for understanding the critical situation of PSM. On the internet, content does not get the same share of attention as in the broadcast sphere. And that is not the only problem. One of the earliest findings from media research is that attention varies in quality and effects (see Cantrill 1947, for example). In everyday use, the reception of linear media is often characterised by low attention levels due to multitasking. The reception of non-linear content presumably features higher attention levels due to requirements for constant interactive engagement (searching, scrolling, clicking, liking, linking, etc.).

In practice, the context of media use has always mattered greatly. The relevance of information for the public was never solely determined by its ‘news value’, as observed early on by Walter Lippmann (1922). The communication networks of each news consumer play a significant role in determining relevance, which is often the combined result of all visited channels; moreover, personal communication tends to have the highest impact overall (Druckman & Nelson 2003; Druckman 2004; Althaus & Kim 2006). Today, social media platforms that rely on this, like Twitter, can play a decisive role in the assessment of information relevance (Gabiello et al. 2016).

Because PSM is tightly bound to the continuing PSB focus on linear distribution of content, their relevance for opinionforming is at risk. Table 1 shows the distribution of the main news sources among generations. The results indicate that people who are age 45 and above mainly use mass media. The statistical midpoint is moving higher year by year.

Table 1. Main source of news by age – all markets (per cent)

Age	Online incl. social media	Social media	Radio	Printed newspapers	TV
18–24	64	33	4	5	24
25–34	58	21	5	5	29
35–44	49	15	6	6	37
45–54	39	10	7	7	45
55+	28	7	7	11	51

Source: Reuters (2017: 11).

The familiar argument that these media contribute a great deal to online news reception and are still present in the minds of recipients might be true, but is little consolation. Mass media had an important role in facilitating shared community experiences. PSM is likely to lose that because the role depends on scarcity of channels. In Europe, this process is not as far along as in the USA. Audience shares for Germany's public broadcasters and the two larger commercial systems are still between 10 and 13 per cent overall for their main programmes. In the USA, the linear TV erosion is far more advanced. Despite having four times the total population, the everyday reach of leading American channels is often below the figures in Germany. A market share below 5 per cent is not unusual for US programmes, while in Germany a 15 per cent share for popular programmes is still common. Of course, the American audience is divided between a greater number of platforms and channels, but a factor of pointed importance is the growing use of non-linear TV services and video platforms.

The erosion of TV audience shares has consequences not only for the relevance of PSM, but also for the economic stability of commercial TV companies. The investment bank, JP Morgan, recently downgraded several European TV enterprises (Boerse-online, July 2017) because expected advertising turnovers are falling below general economic trend lines. This is co-related with growing TV market segmentation that is facilitated by new specialised channels that are not balancing losses for the main channels. This would suggest that the future of TV in Europe is approximate to what is now the case in the USA, and certainly merits monitoring.

In Germany and other European countries, the public media channels remain popular with senior generations, but the share is much smaller in the younger cohorts. In Germany, TV consumption in the 14–29 age group amounts to 93 minutes per day, while all Germans above 14 years of age watch as much as 231 minutes per day. The market share of PSM TV programmes is 45 per cent across age groups, but only 12 per cent among the 14–29 age group. Although interest in news is slightly declining overall, 75 per cent of the TV news consumption is nevertheless for PSM news programmes. But, again, among the younger groups the PSM share is much lower (see for instance Best & Engel 2016). These numbers beg two questions of pressing importance:

1. Will attitudes towards and use of TV change as today's teens and young adults grow older, and especially regarding the use of PSM channels? If not, this could seriously damage PSM's legitimacy.
2. Beyond broadcasting, will PSM be able to balance growing audience losses among the younger generations (and the less educated strata of society) with approximate gains online?

Some preliminary answers are already possible. Public broadcasters (as such) will lose the younger population if they do not position themselves as an essential part of their culture, which is interspersed by the use of personal mobile media. This lesson has been learned by some radio stations, but is largely lacking in TV programming and only evident in small part for PSM web and mobile activities beyond broadcast-related services. As long as 'online' is assessed as an additional, supplemental distribution channel for already produced linear content, it is unlikely that the online strategy of many PSM organisations will succeed. Online media success does depend not only on content, but on the contribution to continuous, complex and increasing communication on digital platforms. For several reasons (see below) many if not most PSM organisations are not yet playing an important role on those platforms.

The problem is not only caused by a broadcasting mentality, but also encouraged by asymmetrical market shares in broadcast market shares compared to online market shares. An example is useful to illustrate. The German news programme *Tagesschau* has a market broadcasting primetime share of around 35 per cent. All websites comprising the ARD network to which *Tagesschau* belongs, together with the sites and apps of the second German public network ZDF, add up to a market share of 11.7 per cent of German online information offerings. Moreover, in the online environment competitors have an overwhelming position of leadership, amounting to 52.8 per cent for print publishers and a close second to PSM for commercial TV news and information websites (7.8 per cent). This disturbs accustomed proportions of intermedia and intramedia relationships. Habitual patterns and heritage trust among audiences do not migrate automatically to new media environments. PSM is challenged to prove their relevance as online and mobile media advances. They at least need to gain a degree of relevance to balance their loss in linear media environments, which is especially important in the generation rift discussed above.

Another problem arises here. For PSM, proof of relevance depends on approving their specific value for public communication. Lacking that, PSM legitimacy is probably doomed. Their legitimacy depends not only on providing quality content that others can't deliver, but on their relations with audiences. Measuring relevance must therefore grapple with a fundamental problem. Despite restrictions that inhibit PSM from fully exploiting online tracking methods to the extent typically used by commercial platforms, and for good reasons, such quantitative measures would miss the point. Tracking user interactions with interface elements (clicks, shares, likes and re-tweets) could not be fairly interpreted as indicators of the relevance of public media channels for and to the public.

The interfaces of online apps support man-machine-interactions and not cultural values, although they may reflect them. At the same time, opinions and values are temporal statements in a fluid process constituted by a complex system of media and personal communication. This being the case, other sources for establishing relevance have to be found for PSM. That will not be easy. For example, one study of news sources among young people in Germany found that although PSM news is the most trusted source, it has a small share of use (JIM 2014). The relevance of a particular political opinion or a cultural tendency in the everyday life of an individual can't be measured by a market survey or profile and tracking data analysis. There is always the likelihood that a message was shared for entertainment value rather than to support the view advocated by its author. A frequently shared (i.e. 'trending') topic doesn't necessarily have high relevance, as most journalists know. As noted earlier, the quality of attention is not equal between situations and devices. Such distinctions can't be easily captured in quantitative studies, and audience retention rates are not an adequate proxy. This is no general argument against using statistical data to generate insights regarding the use of programmes, web services, contents or apps. It is simply to observe that the evaluation of user loyalty and trust or effects that include understanding complex contexts and situations can't be based on such data.

Digital transformation is not easy to manage in any traditional mass media sector – print publishing, commercial broadcasting, or PSB. But there are special obstacles in achieving the transformation to PSM. These organisations are sometimes legally constrained from online development, especially in Europe where transnational and national regulations cause enforced immobility in important areas. PSM organisations generally continue to have a broadcast-based and –oriented mandate with variable additional allowances for online activities. To cope with the development of DMC, an integrated mandate and remit is necessary. Such a mandate must be technologically neutral, focused on the obligation to produce and communicate public value in any and all appropriate media formats. Legal aspects are a big problem, especially in Germany, but only one problem endangering the digital transformation to become fully PSM. Other aspects include weak organisational competences and lack of willingness in the leadership of PSM enterprises. The self-concept of these enterprises can be an obstacle to successful change, as well. For several reasons, TV production and TV audience shares are prioritised over endeavours to develop integrated communication concepts that are essential to relevance, competence and value in networked digital media environments – i.e., the digital media culture. We next scrutinise possible modes of behaviour in this light.

Media platforms

Broadcast media engaged the internet between 1995 and 2000, just before the dot-com bust. Among broadcasters, the possibilities for interactive TV were the focus of

attention, rather than the development of internet services for personal computers. The first steps into web environments differed across enterprises. Some mainly posted programme-related promotional material, some experimented with streaming small portions of broadcast content and some launched experiments with internet-specific content and communications such as live chat. Within a few years, all of these activities were directed towards the development of networked media in PSM that was conceived as a 'third pillar' alongside radio and television. It was generally understood that the internet was somehow interconnected with the broadcasting pillars, but this was mostly treated as a specific category.

After the pioneer years, there was variable degrees of support for publically financed digital services, but generally firm in EU governance. While this was important to some, such as the BBC in Britain and Yle in Finland, in many cases short-sighted leaders in broadcasting companies (public and private) had little interest in expanding online or investing significantly in these 'side' activities. The window of opportunity passed as press publishers, faced with steep decline in advertisement turnover, attacked – especially in the larger media markets of Germany and the UK. PSM was construed as illegal market distortion, which explains much about the state-aid compromise of 2005-2007 (see Donders 2009). Increasingly, the online content of public broadcasters has been restricted to programme-related services in Germany, especially, and what is offered online must be different from content offered by the press and its digital derivatives.

The struggle for PSM mainly happened within national boundaries just as these organisations underwent a broad conversion that prioritises digital networks. The idea of 'networked societies' conveys an optimistic view that emphasises presumed autonomy and sovereignty for participants. But two important aspects undercut this vision and have been largely absent in the discourse:

1. The digital economy is based on technical networks and these do not inherently create 'networked societies'. The technical network is prerequisite for marketing digital products and services, but for the most part doesn't add any special quality. For example, Amazon sold books and then allowed other sellers on the platform for a charge, thereby diversifying the range of goods. But the products were not new or unique. What is new and greatly matters is the development of data storage and analysis capacities combined with global cloud services. Today, Amazon is an enormous cloud-computing platform offering a virtual department store that also offers a streaming service with its own global production strategy.
2. Also missing was any distinction between 'frontend and backend' aspects, which denote what is visible and touchable for users and what is not. All that is not is the heart of the operation and responsible for the functioning of each platform. The backend of Amazon, Facebook and Google are gigantic data evaluation systems. Their strength lies in the capacity for big data analysis and proprietary algorithms that are applications of artificial intelligence. Amazon and Netflix

are now beginning to offer unique original content in the same genres as TV corporations and bidding up sports rights. They are focused on tying their subscribers to their platforms by offering a great variety of personalised content.

The recorded music industry offers an important example. The internet opened opportunities to share music and streaming services like Spotify solved various problems and are now accepted as vital for the music industry, which earlier focused on selling tangible products and failed to create alternative business models. New intermediary platforms now control the sector, and streaming services are beginning to produce original music. Increasingly, internet streaming services not only distribute everyone else's content, but also their own products. They also provide feedback, personalisation and communication services as masters of every internet-based technology. They observe how users behave in detail and react quickly and flexibly.

Taken together, this signals a shift from portals as mere aggregators of content to platforms that provide application programming interfaces (API) and unique services for partners, clients and users. The shift began about ten years ago (Sheratt 2013). Google News provides a good example. Originally, it was seen as a replacement for singular sources, while in recent years it began to co-operate with publishers in revenue sharing. Facebook started as a platform for social networking, but is now also a system for revenue sharing. Big publishers complain about this 'digital duopoly' that controls online news traffic and access to advertising revenues (Eggerton 2017), but they are nonetheless dependent on them. This shift implies that content is no longer king, but rather the intermediary role. Platforms are not interested in the specifics of content; only in the capture of users. Lock-in is what matters most for them. Ideally for the platform operator, all popular content can be found on one site and leaving is not a desired option.

Media platforms and public service media

We now return to PSM more specifically. The shift to the platform economy affects PSM in several ways. The big intermediary platforms are global. In Germany, for example, Amazon Prime Video has become the market leader and is ahead of Netflix, leaving a mere 10 per cent share for the only remaining German streaming video supplier (Maxdome). The national PSM provider may enjoy the charm of regional content and trusted local journalism, but in all other aspects their structure and presentation seems outdated and is not very competitive. The BBC's iPlayer effectively competes in this domain, and there are other PSM firms that also do reasonably well (such as Yle's Arena service), but reliability is lacking because content vanishes from one day to another due to broadcast laws and copyright restrictions. In most cases, the legally allowed access period is very short – especially for acquired content. Many productions cannot appear online or in media libraries. Some of the content is illegally copied by

users and uploaded to YouTube, but the persistence of this content is also unreliable. In many countries, co-operation with commercial partners is not allowed for PSM anyway.

Thus, legal constraints, non-conducive organisational structures, lack of financial potential and sometimes simple unwillingness within the leadership combine to obstruct the progress of digital transformation to produce a mature realisation of PSM. In some cases, politicians are actually more far-sighted than PSM leadership and have forced the establishment of advanced digital services. That is evident in Germany, for example, with the establishment of 'Funk', a streaming platform for the younger generations. The public broadcasters requested a new TV channel instead and failed to appreciate the legal breakthrough in being allowed to produce and license internet content independently from broadcast programmes.

The only unique selling proposition (USP) for PSM programmes on the web – whether live streams or on-demand – is their presumed quality. But online competition is not about content features or even the engaged attention of users for specific content, as much-debated in the early years (see Davenport & Beck 2001). The main interest is not even controlling consumers' behaviour (contrary to Terranova 2012 and Wu 2016). The focus of competition is quite simply the presence of as many people as possible on a particular platform. For the platform operator, attention or distraction makes no real difference. But five hours spent browsing Netflix content means minus five hours using any other service, channel or medium. Platforms that work as intermediaries between content or service providers and end users are completely neutral about content and attention. Competition on the web in the age of platforms is about time spent and exploitable user data, not quality content or engaged attention.

Achieving lock-in requires platforms that are attractive, multifaceted and easy to use. The commercial aspect hinges on revenue sharing as the essential business model. This also affects PSM because platforms consume the time devoted to media use. PSM typically offers a great variety of content, but does not own or manage the platform outside broadcasting. A mixture of legal, organisational and financial constraints may even prevent taking useful steps to mature in digital media environments. The earlier example of online archives and catch-up service restrictions illustrate this. Digitising archives has been a goal in PSM for twenty years, but most work remains to be done. Too often, it actually involves discarding a considerable share of historic collections.

The legal situation for broadcast archives is indeed complicated. All that was produced before online distribution requires copyrights owners to agree to this form of distribution for every single piece. For content produced in the platform era, contracts with rights holders require clauses which allow (or at least don't forbid) a public offering in online repositories. When agreed, that typically entails added costs. And PSM organisations often do not own the rights for all the contemporary content they provide. For citizens who have paid fees or taxes for their services, most assume that all broadcast content will also be available online. Few understand the constraints. In Germany, PSM produces 300 new radio plays every year, but only a part is available in online libraries. Instead, co-producers sell the rights to other firms, typically

streaming partners. Interested listeners seldom have the chance to get ‘free’ access to radio plays unless they incidentally listen to the linear broadcast. Such works of art and elements of cultural history should be accessible without such limitations, but a total buy-out of rights would be a prerequisite.

For public broadcasters that have digitalised archives, a primary purpose is the re-use of content for new productions, which informs internal rules for the retention of archival goods and related metadata. The latter is designed for use by broadcast editors and authors, not researchers who often have difficulties finding specific content in the archives. In Germany, public broadcasters are not legally obliged to even operate archives. Their existence could be ended at any time. But these archives comprise an important audio-visual heritage. For researchers in the humanities, media studies, and political science, access to archival content is of great importance. A topic of pressing importance discussed in international committees of librarians and archivists is how archival metadata can be enhanced by collaborative tagging on open platforms (Golder & Huberman 2006). Open metadata and automatic recognition and indexing systems can make broadcast archives more visible, but for this to happen legal, political and financial deliberations are necessary. This should be done, too, in co-operation with other publically funded cultural institutions. Open archives are an essential public service in the context of the digital media culture.

Digital media culture

The digitisation of production, storage and distribution is only a first step in the digital transformation project. Although technical infrastructures and organisational configurations have changed, the transformation to mature PSM has scarcely begun. Maturity is not only about distribution channels, but includes content, presentation, tonality, external (legal) and internal rules, and most notably the *spirit* of the institution. From an audience perspective, digital developments have brought some improvements, but nothing really fundamental. Technical modernisation in screen resolution and electronic program guides have succeeded, although the latter has not replaced program information in TV magazines and newspapers. Online audio-visual archives could in theory replace personal video recording (PVR), but is contingent as discussed above.

More fundamentally, however, broadcasting companies do not yet consider themselves ‘pure players’ – i.e. online actors first and foremost. They see linear distribution of content as their central task. Online communication is an annex to that. This is not limited to PSM, of course. Commercial broadcasting companies are much the same. Only when this disposition is reversed, so to say, and linear distribution becomes the special case could one fairly say the digital transformation is mature. For now, however, this strategic orientation is largely missing among PSM supporters. To be fair, this is least the case at the BBC and Yle than most other PSM organisations. In those cases, a post-broadcasting era has been articulated and is being pursued to varying degrees.¹

Analysis of failed attempts to achieve acceptance in the digital environment indicates nothing short of complete overhaul in all processes and policies can produce the desired results. The New York Times experienced two failing attempts in 2005 and 2011. In its *Innovation Report 2014* this was the starting point for NYT's third seemingly successful attempt in which every process across the whole enterprise is optimised for digital operations, rather than print. Applied to PSM, this guideline would suggest there would not be any concept in the whole institution focused on serving linear programmes primarily – if at all. Further, the actual needs of online and mobile audiences can only be learned from active communication with them.

Understanding the current state of media development with the 'convergence' notion is arguably problematic because it suggests the identity of 'old' media will (slowly) merge with elements of 'new' media after a vague but apparently longish period of co-existence. Today, it is generally considered common sense that new media won't push aside old media. But the developmental dynamics of the digital media environment applies to all media firms, and this has been broadly underrated and sometimes totally overlooked. The experience from 2000-2005 induced unjustified optimism about the active role of media users after (if there ever is an 'after') the broadcast–internet conversion (Jenkins 2006). Increasingly, it seems the active role of audiences is largely reduced to supplying profile data to feed the algorithmic analysis of digital platform intermediaries.

As observed, the experimental beginnings of online PSM are construed as the 'third pillar', but in the platform era of the digital media culture, broadcasting and online media are not in the same category. Online media constitute not merely another channel that competes with others, but has potential to consolidate all other media channels in a comprehensive system. At the very least, the process is reallocating position of mass media and redefining (downwards) their relevance. This is the process challenging PSM today.

A paradigm change is still pending inside PSM overall. The digital media culture goes beyond the more simplistic 'networked society' notion, providing more scope for assessing legacy media structures and allowing a much greater variety of participants in deciding media-society relations in the platform era. It also enforces the on-going adaptiveness of all media providers. By obliterating traditional distinctions between media, and between professionals and active users, the DMC creates new problems for evaluation and classification of services and content. Many users are adjusting their personal 'signal-to-noise-ratio' and disorientation is not an issue. On the contrary, surveys show satisfaction among users who enjoy their new sovereignty (see Shearer & Gottfried 2017). This transformation is mainly a problem for legacy media organisations, commercial and public alike.

PSM in particular is increasingly embroiled in intermedia collisions with print publishers who claim the right to compose their online services with all available digital assets – text, images, videos, etc. – and do so *exclusively*. They argue that PSM should be restricted to broadcasting, and even there to content that is subject to market failure concerns (i.e. not what is popular). In Switzerland, for example, text elements

must not exceed 1000 characters unless directly related to broadcast programmes; only 25 per cent of texts without such relations are allowed (BAKOM 2007). In Germany, newspaper publishers are campaigning against 'press resemblance', a law stipulating that the content, layout and media elements of websites and apps from PSM must not resemble those of printed newspapers.

Two interconnected paradigms hinder the transformation to mature PSM. One is the prioritisation of linear production and distribution over non-linear strategies, for several reasons. Legal requirements for commissioning, technical structures, employee qualifications, and popular use of broadcasting among older people support adhering to the broadcasting orientation. This is also predominantly supported by political forces and industrial stakeholders who fear economic disruption. And general patterns of media use indicate that the broadcast era will last for several decades still. But there is clearly a danger of sudden de-legitimacy for PSM, particularly in Germany which is a major European media market. Political and public support is eroding there, and there is no mandate for transforming the media system as a whole. In October 2017, a representative of the leading political party, CDU, proposed curtailing the mandate for ARD to restrict services to regional broadcasting content and to discontinue the news programme *Tagesschau*, ARD's journalistic flagship. At this writing, it remains to be seen what the outcome will be.

The second problematic paradigm is the distribution-orientation characteristic of mass media. This orientation addresses the public in a certain way. Mass media enterprises are self-conceived as originators, curators and classifiers of messages (or 'content'), not as participants in a continuous conversation. DMC is a global network and deeply recursive. The self-exclusion from networked communications could be tantamount to extinction for broadcasters. Visible efforts to encourage participation have generally been feeble, late and prone to failure. Concepts like 'trimedial planning and production' of content seem inadequate to cope with today's rapid development of internet-based media. A thorough reorientation and new prioritisation of online media will necessarily require painful decisions regarding linear content, institutional identity, and employees as well as managers. It is understandable but unwise for broadcasters to avoid disruption as long as possible. Unwise because that is a high-risk strategy amounting, in the DMC context, to no strategy at all.

Under present conditions, considerable problems therefore arise not only in the legal and institutional fields for PSM but also with respect to their modes of contact, address and reception given the engrained reliance on broadcast programmes and channels. How will the relation between linear and non-linear services evolve? In the long-term, linear programmes will likely be a special case of discrete digital media services for live shows and sporting events that are inherently linear and time-bound for interest value. The reception of video on demand services like Netflix is already peaking for TV primetime and can be read as a practical criticism of traditional broadcasting. Streaming creates new usage forms like binge viewing of series seasons. Storytelling is already affected by these changing habits (Rezende & Gomide 2017).

The heritage paradigm of TV primetime audience flow and loyalty to a certain channel is decomposing. For TV documentaries and educational programmes, it never existed. Although the linear perspective will remain prevalent for older audiences for some time still, it is reasonable to plan for what happens later in the DMC environment that is rapidly emerging and increasingly comprehensive. The unchanged 220-240 minutes of daily linear TV viewing by older audiences is already irrelevant for younger users. Their orientation is not linked to channel logos but to content brands.

In a near future, broadcasting will only be distinctive in formats as discussed. Already today, successful multimedia productions demonstrate how important benefits can be derived only by harnessing all available sources and materials. An essential observation is that the reception of video content is currently the strongest trend online, and particularly for smartphone use and among younger generations. The most important feature of smartphones is not mobility but the fact that they are *personal*. The three most common places where smartphones are used are the places most common for people to be: at home, at work and in shops (Google 2016). They are increasingly used in parallel with laptops and television. YouTube viewing spikes during primetime and happens on smart TVs and smartphones, whereas computer-based viewing peaks around lunchtime. The average YouTube viewing session on smartphones is now more than 40 minutes, and 42 per cent of YouTube users watch videos on smartphones *only*. Adolescents may spend a lot of time in rooms where a TV is switched on, but viewing on smartphones is apparently more relevant. This option is most consistent with their preferences and facilitates communication with friends about video and web content.

Today's buzz about 'cross-mediality' and 'trimediality' is mainly focused on the 'third pillar' and fails to capture the need for media with a public value mandate to be active on mobile media services. That requires financial and organisational efforts that are constrained by the traditional broadcasting orientation of PSM (see Virta & Lowe 2016). TV and radio departments may be willing to share content with their online counterparts, but not their budgets. For instance, an initiative proposed by a highly-ranked TV editor for a German broadcaster to spend only 1 per cent of all editorial TV budgets for YouTube reformatting and user communication failed because colleagues *and* the company's leadership resisted.

For its part, the so-called third pillar of online media often have no legal mandate to produce independent content, while the two primary pillars in broadcasting are not inclined to support production of adequate, much less impressive, online content by adapting programme strategies and financial schemas. This dilemma is unlikely to be solved within the confines of the self-conception of PSM as 'broadcasting plus'.

Many PSM organisations are not making any conspicuous efforts to test the boundaries of their legal mandates or organise political support for the transformation to become fully integrated digital media operators. Most dissipate their energy in fighting rear guard battles against commercial media efforts to delegitimise their mandates. The generation rift and an alleged abundance of public value content from

commercial sources online provides a familiar rationale for reducing or eliminating public funding for media. The adverse impact has been rising in recent years.

Cross-media or trimedia productions try to reflect requirements and expectations of contemporary DMC development, but lack a fully fleshed out strategic concept for editorial work and resource utilisation. Without such a frame, attempts generate only a semblance of accomplishment and avoid any fundamental shift. ‘Three pillar’ thinking doesn’t do this, but instead maintains linear media in their traditional priority position, leads to underfinancing of the online ‘pillar’, and neglects the difficult transition from annunciation (broadcast transmission) to dialogue (social media communication) as the basis for all production.

The future of PSM is at stake. The next ten to fifteen years will decide if broadcast-centred organisations can adapt to the dynamic DMC environment and retain influence in the global platform era. The full digital transformation of PSB to really become PSM must include a thorough revaluation of traditional broadcast mentality, beginning as soon as possible. I believe their active contribution is crucial to the general progress of the digital media culture, but requires a necessary transformation. They can only be successful if allowed to restructure themselves, and if they develop the expertise to accomplish this. Most importantly, it depends on the willingness to do this.

The German media structure, which is the biggest public service media system, is endangered by potential collapse due to a lack of enough innovation. This is not totally their fault because legal obstacles and the regulatory situation is a serious complicating factor. Moreover, responsibility is distributed across 16 regional states and the discursive climate is increasingly aggressive against PSM. That needs to change because without a strategy to accomplish an integrated mandate and integrated digital media organisation, PSM will crumble in the context of a thorough and increasingly global digital media culture.

Note

1. See the 2016 Special Issue of the *International Communication Gazette*, edited by Marko Ala-Fossi on Broadcasting in the Post-Broadcasting Era.

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Algorithms and Public Service Media

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Abstract

Algorithms increasingly shape the flow of information in societies. Recently, public service media organisations have begun to develop algorithmic recommender systems and automated systems in their internet services, which makes sense given their importance as mediators of information. In the emerging era of big data and growing personalisation, this makes sense strategically and can have instrumental importance for networked societies. This chapter draws on relevant development projects in European and Australian public service media organisations. In relation to the core principles of public service media, five challenges in operationalising automated rule-based systems are identified: 1) balancing popularity and distinctiveness, 2) diversity of exposure to programming, 3) transparency of the logic underlying recommendations, 4) user sovereignty and, 5) the issue of dependence on or independence from commercial intermediaries. The chapter examines a new set of conditions that affect provision public service provision in societies that feature growing use and reliance on networked media.

Keywords: computer ethics, universalism, content diversity, transparency, chat-bots, recommender systems, personalisation

Introduction

This chapter is about decision-making algorithms in public service media (PSM). An algorithm is a set of typically non-transparent rules for selecting and recommending media content. Algorithmic media are a constituent feature of networked communication platforms. Our interest is focused on implications for PSM. We begin with an overview of computer ethics because the essential issues are normative concerns. We prioritise the importance and complications of editorial work in the networked society context. We argue that algorithms do not solve problems caused by editorial bias, but can be effective when used alongside human judgment. The chapter is important for deliberating on PSM policy design because algorithmic media are increasingly ubiq-

uitous and arguably fundamental to the media networks that underpin a networked society as such.

The business models for Facebook, Google, Netflix and Amazon depend on the continual development of proprietary algorithms that automate content selection options presented to each user as a personalised set of recommendations based on presumed or actual interest, as indicated by previous online activity using a platform. An algorithm consists of two components: “a logic component, which specifies the knowledge to be used in solving problems, and a control component, which determines the problem-solving strategies by means of which that knowledge is used” (Kowalski 1979: 424).

The development of algorithms in PSM is congruent with this general trend in networked media, but raises difficult ethical questions related to a shift in agency from individual decision-making to the influence of automated systems (see Dworkin 1988; Brey 2005). This shift encourages reformulating the heritage understanding of ‘audiences’ as ‘users’, which in principle reflects the de-prioritisation of consumption *per se*. A popular example used in the field of computer ethics is self-driven automobiles that shift the locus of decision-making from the driver to sophisticated software (Goodall 2014; Lin 2016). Causality and result are both hidden in the ‘black box’ of an on-board computer that utilises algorithms to make driving ‘decisions’ (Brey 2005). In this instance, the key question is about who is responsible for what does and doesn’t happen during vehicle operation – the driver, who isn’t actually a driver in this context, or the software? Or even the programmer/coder of the software? Or, perhaps, the owner of the network grid that enables systemic communication as the vehicle navigates in the driving environment?

The practical problem demonstrated in the example is an asymmetric distribution of agency because automated systems make ‘decisions’ that can be based on flawed normative or behavioural assumptions (Vedder 1999). At worst, there is no possibility to override the automated decision. That is why algorithmic recommendations are sensitive matters and should be explained to users (Tintarev & Masthoff 2015). But explaining and understanding recommendation systems requires deep technical knowledge as the results are produced by a series of complex and often counter-intuitive calculations (Koren et al. 2009). Furthermore, recommendations are often the result of more than one algorithm applied in the online and offline processing of consumer behaviour data (Armatriain & Basilico 2015); Netflix is a commonly used example. The asymmetrical relation this creates between users and media content providers is especially problematic for PSM due to its public complexion and its social responsibility obligations. It is therefore a central focus of our discussion.

A second issue of particular relevance to the public complexion of PSM was recently underscored by Danaher (2016) as a threat he characterised as ‘algocracy’ that is rooted in the opacity of algorithmic decision-making. This applies to the ownership and commercialised use of a continually expanding volume of personal information that is collected and integrated as ‘big data’ for the strategic and commercial interests

of network media firms. Over the past 20 years, a large literature base has developed about privacy problems related to this threat (e.g. Moor 1997; Thompson 2001; Zarsky 2005). Danaher emphasises the inaccessibility of algorithms due to the complexity of parameters and processing that make algorithmic decision-making incomprehensible to most people. In addition to general problems related to opacity and privacy invasion, when algorithms are used by PSM organisations a third and specific threat arises. The lack of transparency and inherent system complexity can threaten PSM legitimacy, and should therefore be a core concern for public sector organisations in the application of automated systems.

Algorithms can be quite useful because they generate personalised recommendations as the result of sophisticated computations based on expressed personal interests. How this works is partly known and partly concealed. The general filtering principles used by Google, Facebook, Amazon and Netflix are published (Page et al. 1998; Linden et al. 2003; Ali & van Stam 2004; Amatriain & Basilico 2015), but the configuration, implementation and datasets are proprietary (Machill & Beiler 2007; Hallinan & Striphas 2016). As Sunstein (2007) observed, personalised systems are useful to optimise media exposure but can bias an individual's exposure to sources and facilitate 'filter bubbles' (Pariser 2011). Research has confirmed this problem (see Bozdag 2013). Further, researchers have found that the different filtering principles used by Google, Facebook and Twitter produce divergent rankings, even when using the same dataset (Birkbak & Carlsen 2016).

In short, algorithms are instrumental for determining what information and which sources are found, how easily and quickly, and with what prioritisation. The trade-offs are of central concern to the character and quality of public life in a networked society. That said, we do not imply that recommendations per se are new. Broadcasting has long used scheduling strategies, previews (or trailers) and marketing for that purpose. But the presentation of content selection options in broadcasting is more transparent (although not totally) and not as precisely targeted to individuals based on a personal history of behaviour. Moreover, the traditional broadcast mode of content dissemination has not produced the growing body of detailed data that is now owned and can only be analysed by the firm that controls the platform and uses this information mainly to achieve its own self-interested objectives.

In the networked media environment, incorrect assumptions about user interests often reveal flaws in algorithmic designs. A familiar example is the case of a 'straight' TiVo user who received recommendations for gay-related films. He attempted to correct the false assumptions by deliberately choosing war-related films, but then began receiving recommendations for films about Nazis and the Third Reich (Zaslow 2002). So, although potentially useful and even beneficial in many cases, the quality of recommendations is a function of the quality of the algorithm's design, which is always based on a set of assumptions that can be flawed in practice. This is personalisation gone awry, so to say.

Recommendations are based on how user needs have been modelled in the software. Collaborative filtering is a core feature of algorithms and is based on mathematical formulas (Shardanand & Maes 1995; Linden et al. 2003). Accuracy is obviously important, but problematic to achieve and also not in itself sufficient to guarantee a good user experience (McNee et al. 2006). Serendipity is the ultimate goal, which happens when a user experiences the system ‘as if it read my mind’ (Ricci et al. 2015). Achieving this depends on modelling user preferences to recommend content that achieves a challenging balance between predictability and novelty (Castells et al. 2015). Most algorithms are commercial systems that combine a diverse set of methods to weight results on the basis of sophisticated and usually hidden data analyses.

Today, PSM organisations are increasingly involved with algorithms in two ways. First, their content is subject to the same recommendation system dynamics as all other kinds of content that is searchable online. This can’t be avoided by any content making company and must be managed as well as possible by techniques involving metadata and search optimisation. Second, an increasing number of PSM organisations are developing their own algorithmic recommender systems with the goal of enhancing the findability and exposure of their content, and to improve interactive services and personalisation. This makes sense given the importance of algorithms in the media environment overall, but in doing this PSM faces challenges that can be categorised in five dimensions that we explain in detail towards the end of the chapter. To demonstrate particular issues that PSM currently faces with algorithms, we present a case study from Australia where the ABC is developing an automated news service called ‘ChatBot’. We then explore several highly current issues in the European context.

ABC ChatBot

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation has developed an automated service that relies on an algorithmic design which seeks to avoid the ‘black box’ software problem by 1) co-creating technology with their ‘audience’ and 2) constructing stories using third party platforms (especially Facebook). The ABC ChatBot is our case study for operationalising issues that are pertinent to the development of algorithms in PSM with its distinctive ethos that prioritises transparency.

ABC Chatbot is an automated news service that operates on the Facebook Messenger platform to deliver news items directly to a user through mobile phone notification. The items are typically a mixture of three articles: one key news item, an article on something less socially pressing but relatively important, and one lifestyle article. The user interacts with the Chatbot through short messages, which send automated responses. The project demonstrates the role of automation and recommendation in the development of news and journalism in PSM, which have long been a focal feature of their services for the public.

The ABC is widely respected for a heritage of success in balancing journalism with broad appeal, quality educational content, and facilitating public debate on issues that matter for all Australian citizens. With the launch of ChatBot, the ABC has opened discussion about issues related to media diversity and authenticity in news production and distribution, thereby tangling with contemporary concerns about fragmented niche audiences that desire specialised news and media content (Jakubowicz 2007; McClean 2011), algorithms and authenticity (Ford et al. 2016), and PSM datafication (Hutchinson 2017). In developing ChatBot, the problems of keenest concern hinge on the risk of disrupting ABC's position as a reputable news organisation and undermining perceptions of the reliability of ABC journalism. The ChatBot initiative is part of a complex, on-going transition at the ABC – from a traditional PSB organisation to a mature PSM enterprise that is fully aligned with general media trends in the development of a digitally networked society. But the initiative poses thorny challenges and may threaten the legitimacy of the enterprise as a public service organisation.

Chatbots are becoming prolific online. Facebook launched theirs in late 2016 as a way for customers to interface with businesses and organisations in ways that are perceived as being more human and therefore presumably meaningful. The primary purpose for Facebook is to encourage higher commercial sales, which isn't very pertinent to a PSM organisation that is not supposed to be involved with product sales and has a mission to educate, inform and entertain audiences. Thus, one faces the immediate problem of establishing the legitimacy of the chat bot in this context, which is one focus of debate in Australia.

Chatbots utilise artificial intelligence algorithms which determine their impact. A pertinent challenge for PSM is their capacity and limitations for engaging citizens on public issues because what a chat bot deems important may not necessarily be significant to the public interest. The importance of getting automation right is evident in the recent derailing of Microsoft's foray into artificial intelligence (AI) with its multiplatform bot called 'Tay'. In designing a bot to operate across Twitter, Kik and GroupMe platforms, Tay was supposed to learn through interacting with users in conversations with them. The software was designed to mimic assumptions the coders made about an average 19-year old American female. Users were encouraged to tell her to "repeat after me", followed by the syntax the user would like the bot to learn. Within 24 hours, Tay had mutated from a caring bot ("humans are super cool") into a Nazi ("Hitler was right; I hate Jews"). Microsoft decommissioned the bot.

This example indicates both the potential for bots and important dangers in designing algorithms. Automated algorithms can be programmed to function in specific patterns, but if the assumptions are incorrect or the information is misleading, all subsequent interactions with the bot can compound an escalating dysfunctionality.

The ABC has been engaged with automation development since 2012, especially recommendation systems based on AI algorithms. Multiple iterations of 'Your iView' and 'My Radio' have been based on various ways of data tracking, for example using cookies or beacons (small coded tracking programmes that provide the audience with

a selection of suggestions for content they might find interesting based on previous viewing or listening choices). Functionality depends on a blend of datafication, user profiling and assistance in problem-solving in deciding what to watch in an environment of abundant choice. Recalling Kowalski's (1979) definition at the start of this chapter, one problem for PSM is that crafting an effective algorithm requires tightening control over choice options.

The ABC first experimented with AI during the 2016 Australian election when it launched a Twitter bot (@abcnewsbot) to help Australians ask questions about the election as it unfolded. The bot was programmed to know the basic information about the election, each candidate and party, and attuned to live election results. At the completion of this experiment, generally considered a success, the ABC launched the ChatBot application on Facebook Messenger as the news team's focal experiment with AI in social media. The aforementioned problem of the need for deep technical understanding is relevant because only specialists understand the ChatBot's code and can evaluate the journalistic quality of outcomes. This disjunction is the context for a complicated struggle between regulation, content production and software coding.

The ABC ChatBot relies on a typical approach to coding that sees software as being in a continual beta state. This approach is useful for capturing user reactions and gleaning information from user behaviours that is continually integrated with developmental tweaks and reformulations. A PSM user will ideally engage with the ChatBot as a 'trusted' media source, which suggests they will perceive it differently from their commercial counterparts because of the source. This is important to the ABC because, "one of the key characteristics of our foray into messaging is the interaction with the audience that it allows [...]. [T]he natural behaviour in a messaging app is to reply to messages. This offers the prospect of us 'harvesting' reactions to news stories which we can then incorporate into our coverage" (Watts 2016: n.p.). Of particular interest is the way news stories are delivered to users, and how they are prompted to interact with the ChatBot, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Interacting with the ChatBot is rather mundane and similar to scrolling through a web-based article as the user scans for information that is personally relevant. But there are difficulties in conversing with participants who respond to a conversational remark or question that depends on understanding syntax. This is illustrated in Figure 2.

It is difficult to predict the outcome of algorithmic recommendation and AI interaction at an individual level because although these systems are dynamic they are bounded by syntax. A lot that is important for their use is opaque to ordinary users and, in practice, continually emergent (Danaher 2016; Hallinan & Striphas 2016). Algorithmic recommendations represent a shift of control to software programmers and data curators who configure and adjust the algorithms. Control over media content exposure is relocated from human news editors to a mathematical logic that is predictable because it follows rules, and yet also unpredictable due to complex conditions. Each recommendation is calculated and weighted by features that are dynamic and managed by algorithms in a situation that is paradoxical because these systems are

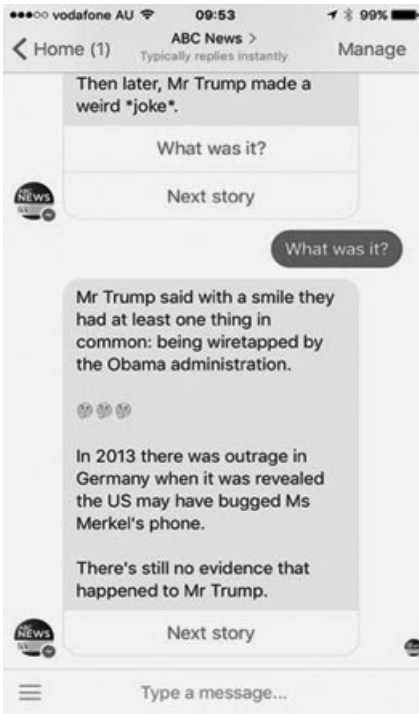


Figure 1. User interaction with the ABC ChatBot

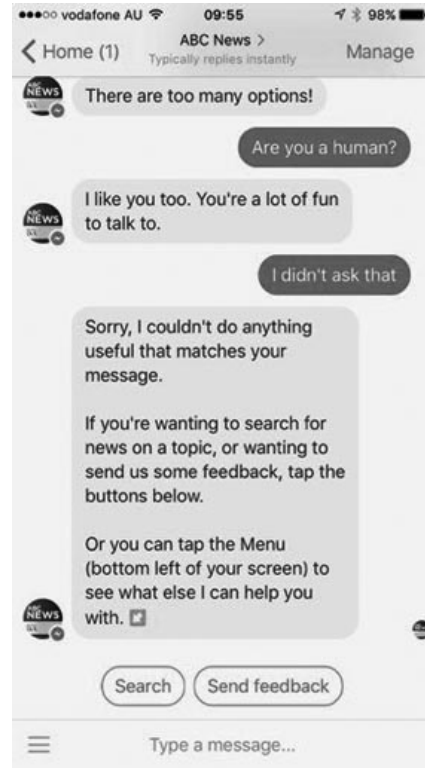


Figure 2. ChatBot having difficulty responding to syntax

entirely rule-bound but produce an emergent complexity that is difficult for humans to understand – much less predict.

These AI systems require PSM organisations to translate editorial values and policies into software code. Given contemporary debate over core values and appropriate editorial policies for PSM, the additional complication is considerable. PSM programming policies typically suggest that it is important to expand an audience's areas of interests and knowledge through discovery. This begs the question as to how well that can be accomplished by algorithmic recommendations, and whether this should be enforced by the rule-based code? Moreover, which features of an algorithmic recommendation system used by a PSM organisation can demonstrate a necessary distinctiveness in programming and services? An algorithm could be specifically designed to promote personalised content with high public value in general terms, but then it would not necessarily be keyed to the expressed interests of individual users. Moreover, this reopens the sticky question about PSB paternalism in the PSM context, as well as forcing a 'PSM diversity diet' (Sørensen & Schmidt 2016). Should a PSM recommendation system be a tool for the user-citizen to protect and manage

her or his media diet in today's attention economy, or mainly a tool for the PSM to optimise exposure to content, or a tool mainly to promote enlightenment? If all three, then with what prioritisation and how to do all of that in ways that satisfy the interest in personalisation?

The ABC ChatBot can be understood as a mechanism of 'soft control' that enables AI in the coded algorithm to 'learn' to address PSM values, specifically those related to transparency, dependability and trustworthiness. This learning process can assist firms and audiences in maintaining the relevance of public media content in a networked society by demonstrating both persistent and emergent values in the practice of public service beyond broadcast transmission. Through a consultative process with users as participants, the ABC is addressing transparency in a range of issues that include unbiased recommendations, diversity of content produced and offered, privacy concerns, and revealing how the AI works. But the ABC has decided to build their bot on the Facebook Messenger platform, which makes sense economically and given popular use, but limits their development capacity for public service per se. We next consider the potential and problems in PSM development of algorithmic recommender systems as understood by PSM managers involved with this work. The chapter reports original empirical findings in research conducted by one of the authors.

EBU members' recommender systems

In many interactive services, users deal with algorithmic recommendations, but for public service media webpages, this has been rare until recently. However, among EBU members, there is growing interest, as indicated in conferences for its Big Data Initiative (EBU 2016a, 2017). These conferences explore the potential for PSM content promotion and production planning on the basis of analysing large amounts of data about media consumption collected from PSM web services. Mining this data may help editors reach users more efficiently via algorithmic recommendation systems, and more closely observe and quickly identify shifting trends in user interests in real-time. There are challenges under discussion that have been elaborated in a series of interviews with PSM big data practitioners from DR (Denmark), ZDF (Germany), RTBF (Belgium) and BR (Germany)¹, as well as PSM project leaders, data analysts, programmers and managers from the BBC (UK), ERR (Estonia), RAI, (Italy), RTE (Ireland), RTS (Switzerland) and YLE (Finland).²

The interviewees see the use of 'big data' algorithmic recommendations as strategically important for the survival of PSM organisations in an increasingly networked media system. Failing to analyse user behaviours and present personalised recommendations would sacrifice needed insights about user preferences, and lower efficiency in the exposure of PSM content compared with other content providers. The algorithmic recommendation system is considered vital for presenting PSM content in contemporary media platforms.

There are concerns. On the editorial level, a key concern has to do with feeding filter bubbles, as noted earlier. PSM's obligation to provide unbiased and fair programming lead many to worry that an algorithm which optimises recommendations based on specific (and assumed) user interests could violate general PSM programming policy that is premised on legal mandates as well as ethical priorities. This is a looming question as PSM organisations grapple with practical questions involved with doing big data analyses and building recommender systems, which are complex and require particular technical skills for software development. This may be an overwhelming challenge for a PSM organisation simply to develop and maintain on its own. Although this approach would accumulate knowledge within the organisation and ensure full control of the collected user data, getting it done is costly and time-consuming.

Pursuing a swift launch is preferred by some PSM firms, as in Denmark. DR thinks it is necessary to keep pace with the rapid development of media systems of pivotal importance among other providers. Other PSM firms do not see an immediate need and prefer a longer time-horizon for the introduction of recommender systems. A third group already has recommender systems, including the BBC (UK), NRK (Norway), RAIplay (Italy), RPT (Portugal), YLE (Finland) and ZDF (Germany).

The pace of technological development is fast and a lot of PSM content is not that different from what is provided by commercial media. Thus, one option is to use a commercial recommender system 'off the shelf'. Deciding whether to use a ready-made recommender service or build their own revolves around questions of control. The use of external software may create a strategic vulnerability. One interviewee expressed the view that controlling the recommendation system software and user data may become as important as control of radio transmitters was for many PSM operators earlier. Whether the implementation of recommender systems actually implies loss of control, independence or integrity for these organisations is an important focus for future research as recommender systems are developed.

The choice of a technological solution raises fundamental questions for PSM organisations. Within the EBU, a group of PSM organisations have joined forces to develop a PSM-oriented recommender system called the "PEACH" project³, which combines classic recommender algorithms (content-based filtering to find similar content and collaborative filtering to find similar users) with a novel mechanism to recommend diverse content.⁴ This can be seen as a first attempt to implement PSM-specific editorial values in an algorithm, as discussed by Sørensen and Schmidt (2016). Still, Helberger's question (2015) about intervention at the end-user level to ensure unbiased exposure and equal chances for media content exposure remains unaddressed at the operational/technical level. The question is whether PSM's particular obligations to provide unbiased programming requires the development of a new approach to algorithmic recommendation, or if existing recommendation principles, derived from practice in e-commerce and online shopping are sufficient? In short, the extent to which PSM praxis fits with a commercial media recommender system is unclear.

The introduction of algorithms implies a shift within PSM organisations. The automated, rule-based exposure of content on webpages and apps challenges traditional editorial practice. Also, the traditional metric of broadcasting reach is challenged by big data systems that offer (commercial) media organisations real-time analytics, precise user segmentation, and behaviour prediction. Traditional ways of planning and evaluating programme and service success will be challenged by insights that detailed analyses of PSM consumer habits can offer. The classical Reithian idea of not only giving people what they want but also introducing them to unfamiliar content will be challenged by reliance on algorithms. Again, PSM organisations must seek another approach to the interpretation of what amounts to consumer data due to the requirement of distinctiveness for PSM content.

The new technologies also require a difficult transfer of knowledge within PSM organisations. Data analysts and computer programmers (developers) now perform tasks that are key determinants for exposure to PSM content. Success is no longer only about making and scheduling programmes. This knowledge is difficult to communicate to journalists and editors, who typically don't engage in these development projects. This can weaken the organisation strategically and, on a practical level, create problems caused by failing to include or correctly mark the metadata that is essential for findability. Deep understanding of how a system recommends content is shared among a small group of experts, returning us to the question of 'opaqueness' raised by Danaher (2016). Ultimately, this points to the need for a future re-conceptualisation of PSM editorial work as a public data curating service.

Challenges in algorithmic development for public service media

We distil our understanding of crucially important challenges involved in algorithmic development for PSM in five dimensions. Each contextualises key questions that will need to be addressed.

1. Reach and distinctiveness

Nissen (2006) underscored a persistent tension in PSM is between maximising reach and maintaining distinctiveness. Does algorithmic recommendation challenge this balance? As PSM organisations implement algorithms, discussion about this tension will likely re-emerge. The point of recommending is to maximise potential reach for PSM content, but employing algorithms requires standardising the nature of content and may dilute distinctions that are essential for PSM content to have uniqueness. A related question is whether traditional understandings of reach and distinctiveness can be consistent across broadcast and online content dissemination? Further, what will be the primary point of reference – broadcasting for society as a whole or serv-

ing individual consumption preferences? If the latter, which seems more likely as networked media platforms grow and broadcast spectrum is challenged, this can put the heritage emphasis on collective social service for publics at risk (Helberger 2012). Commercial recommendation systems are designed to satisfy individual user needs as indicated by patterns of personal use. Current algorithms do not accommodate the distinctiveness of PSM content as a parameter. Using the same recommender principles that are common in commercial media may also trigger market failure criticisms, leading to complicated and costly ‘public value tests’ (PVTs).

2. Provision of diversity

As noted by Burri (2015) and Helberger (2015), PSM organisations have a particular obligation to reflect and promote diversity. Traditionally, this has been addressed in production and programming. As access to users’ attention is now increasingly controlled by online intermediaries such as Facebook and Google, ensuring diversity becomes more difficult. Currently, no automated system reflects the editorial understanding of diversity that is vital to PSM as such (Sørensen & Schmidt 2016). In the broadcasting context, editors are able to ensure diverse perspectives and contents for viewers, but this is not the case in online media where recommendation systems pattern the presentation of options based on algorithms. Further research will be needed to map differences between mathematically calculated diversity (automated) and diversity as produced manually in the creation and programming of content. But the key question is how to guarantee diversity, and of which types and for all groups, if recommendation systems are based on principles that aim to optimise personalised consumption?

3. Transparency

PSB organisations have been accused of paternalistic attitudes (Tracey 1998). Paternalism can be understood as the ‘gate-keeping’ function whereby content is selected and curated for dissemination of knowledge (Scannell 2005). Algorithmic recommender systems risk a renewal of perceptions that PSM is paternalistic (Brey 2005; Spiekermann & Pallas 2006). Following Tintarev and Masthoff (2015), it is therefore important to inform users about why particular content is being recommended, and how the recommendation happens, although this is a difficult task given the technical complexity. Another aspect of transparency in relation to algorithmic recommendation involves PSM management and auditing. The digital delivery of content combined with user login requirements open opportunities for detailed reporting on consumption patterns. Will performance goals and key performance indicators for PSM organisations be linked to particular segments or user types? Will they be related to narrow policy goals? A consequence of this would be that the ‘universalist mission’ of PSM is severely at risk.

4. User sovereignty and the attention economy

Concern that users suffer from information overload (Eppler & Mengis 2004) is a familiar argument for developing recommendation systems. In reality, the objective is to optimise exposure to particular content. Recommendation systems may help users manage their attention economy focus (Goldhaber 1997, 2006; Mitchell 2005), but there are conflicting interests that these systems do not resolve. Algorithms make it possible to enforce some PSM programming policies (e.g. broadcasting a minimum percentage of national music), but the persistent tension between agenda-setting and user-agency, or between paternalism and popularity, are actually intensified. The reach-distinctiveness problem treated earlier now takes on a techno-paternalistic dimension (Spiekermann & Pallas 2006). This raises the question of how algorithmic recommendation systems affect the balance between agenda setting as a positive aspect and paternalism as a problematic aspect?

5. Dependency

Editorial independence is a core value in public service broadcasting (UNESCO 2001). But today the distribution of and exposure to media content increasingly relies on social network intermediaries that use recommendation algorithms. This creates a dilemma for PSM organisations which are not-for-profit organisations but inherently participants in a commercial media ecology (Leurdijk 2007). As Sørensen and van den Bulck (forthcoming) demonstrate, the use of external third-party web services for media content delivery, media recommendation, audience behaviour measurement, and sale of advertisement, makes PSM organisations increasingly integrated in and dependent on the global business ecology of web services (Lindskow 2016). While this makes sense from an operational perspective, such a practice may challenge the trustworthiness of PSM organisations in seeming overly concerned about competitive success and maximising reach. This raises questions about the ways in which PSM organisations are becoming increasingly dependent on commercial software providers with proprietary interests, third-party providers that are not mandated to provide public service per se, and social networks outside their control. Dependency is not necessarily a bad thing, but how will PSM manage the downside of this perceived vulnerability?

Conclusion

The introduction of algorithms in PSM directs attention to the unique value of human editorial work. Developing algorithmic systems requires crafting exact descriptions and unambiguous valuations of media content. This renders them more predictable within the boundaries of their formulaic constructions, and possibly less biased when compared with human recommenders. But this also makes them inherently

less thoughtful and largely unconcerned with ethical dilemmas – both of which go to the very heart of public service and are as important in networked communications as in mass media.

With refinements based on use and results, algorithms could be tweaked to deliver a transparent, relevant and diverse personal PSM diet to each user. But for reasons we have discussed, it is so far uncertain if this is actually the best way forward for PSM development? It makes sense from a technological perspective focused on aligning PSM with general conditions that characterise the networked society as a mediated environment, but this will open PSM to potential legitimacy problems with regard to enacting several of its core values. It also inherently means that PSM would be engaged with and dependent on global social media firms in which intermedia relations are highly asymmetrical.

Moreover, this area of development puts PSM organisations squarely in the crosshairs of those who argue against their engagement in innovative development. Complaints about destabilising media markets, unfair competition, and subsidised innovation are likely to be heard in the near future as algorithmic development continues. Further, PSM will be under pressure to ensure that their algorithmic systems demonstrate public value, adhere to heritage values, are properly distanced from commercial and vested self-interests, and maintain editorial independence. All of that is possible, but obviously complicated in technical, operational and political terms.

One should remember, however, that the public service ethos and characteristic PSM's core values are not rigid or universally defined. Different PSM organisations have emphasised different elements and aspects, in different political frameworks, under varying conditions over time. That is evident in variations of public service contracts and regulatory texts over time and from country to country, and in the instruments of oversight that exist in some but not all countries. The introduction of algorithmic systems will force PSM to express its values and goals as measurable key performance indicators, which could be useful and perhaps even necessary. But this could also create existential threats to the institution by undermining the core principles and values that are essential for legitimacy.

In the end, the key question is whether algorithms will be developed to embody a localised public service media ethos or become another problematic development in their reliance on commercial systems. Can the values and interpretations of PSM values, and the ethos overall, be handled appropriately in developing algorithmic designs? Can PSM values even be expressed in the mathematical language of coding logic? Or are they a human-contingent praxis that cannot be formalised in algorithms? Can coding and design practice address the complicated concerns of the need to give voice to minority groups, address marginalised concerns, and ensure that publics are informed about all crucial issues of pressing public interest? All of that remains to be seen and the answers are likely to be complicated and uneven. The issues treated in this chapter are essential because public service media are already important nodes in networked media systems with instrumental importance for building networked societies.

Notes

1. DR: Project leader Jacob Faarvang (three interviews: December 2016, February 2017, June 2017). ZDF: Project leader Andreas Grün (interview: March 2017). RTBF: project leader Pierre-Nicolas Schwab (informal conversation: February 2017). BR: (the PEACH recommender system project) lead programmer Veronika Eickhoff (interview: June 2017)
2. Conversations have been conducted in the context of a workshop and a conference organised by the EBU 'Big Data Initiative' (EBU 2016a, 2017).
3. 'PEACH' – 'Personalisation for Each', is developed by Bayerische Rundfunk (BR) and Radio Télévision Suisse (Switzerland), and supported by the EBU (<http://peach.ebu.io/team/about/> visited July, 10 2017). Currently it is implemented by BR, RTS and RTP. At the PEACH home page, a larger group of PSMs, including BBC (R&D), YLE, RAI, RTVE, VRT and TVP are being acknowledged for their support and help to the PEACH project.
4. cf.: <https://ebu.io/organizations/blog/58/17/2017/04/27/the-role-of-diversity-in-recommender-systems-for-public-broadcasters> (accessed 2017-09-26)

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Section II

Policy, Structures and Governance

Public Service Media in the ‘Network’ Era

A Comparison of Remits, Funding, and Debate in 17 Countries

Corinne Schweizer & Manuel Puppis

Abstract

This chapter presents findings from a recent comparative study on public service media and their regulation as regards their remit, funding, services and debate. Based on a literature review, the authors propose three ways in which the network paradigm can be useful for studying public service media: 1) to discuss how public service media embrace the internet, 2) to describe a more profound process of change affecting public service media, and 3) to locate public service media organisations in relation to national and international (stakeholder)-networks. Using this framework to (re-)interpret our findings enables a comparison of the ‘network era’ with its precursor, the ‘digital age’, and reveals starting points for further research.

Keywords: network paradigm, digital age, post network era, market shares, public service media reform, public service media stakeholders

Introduction

Today, discourse about media emphasises the notion of being ‘networked’. Yochai Benkler (2006) and Manuel Castells (2011) have been especially influential in promoting the network paradigm, which in their view represents a fundamental shift of the power relations in society. The rapidly increasing availability and uses of new information and communication technology (ICT) have disrupted legacy institutions that are challenged by decentralised networks. Top-down hierarchies face bottom-up resistance (González-Bailón 2013). Legacy institutions are challenged by the need to ‘stand their ground’ and also adapt successfully to the new media environment, and this certainly includes public service media (PSM) organisations.

In a recent study for the Swiss Ofcom¹, we gathered comparative data about PSM in 17 Western countries.² Like many scholars (see Donders 2012: 9), we used the ‘digital age’ term to describe the circumstances of PSM. Our goal was to identify commonalities and differences in four main areas: formulation of the remit, regulation and key figures in funding for public and commercial media, offers and market shares, and

Schweizer, Corinne & Puppis, Manuel (2018). Public Service Media in the ‘Network’ Era. A Comparison of Remits, Funding, and Debate in 17 Countries in Gregory Ferrell Lowe, Hilde Van den Bulck, Karen Donders (eds.) *Public Service Media in the Networked Society*. Göteborg: Nordicom.

debates and reforms. We wanted to compare how PSM in Western countries have adapted to the ‘digital age’, in a sense the precursor to and for the ‘networked society’.

The fact that all PSM organisations face similar challenges makes this an ideal object for comparative research (Raats & Pauwels 2011). Comparison enables identifying both specifics and commonalities, detecting trends and innovations in policymaking, and is conducive to typology development (Thomaß 2010). This is needed due a lack of broad comparative research projects in this field (Raats & Pauwels 2011; Puppis and d’Haenens 2012). Furthermore, media policy research is often criticised for a lack of theoretical discussion (Woldt 2005). In this chapter, we present relevant findings from our comparative study and use the network paradigm as the lens for (re-)interpretation.

In order to clarify how the network paradigm has been used in research about PSM, the chapter begins with a literature review. We identify varying points of view (methodological, conceptual, and practical) and consider popular buzzwords that target different aspects of the network notion. After an overview of our research design and method, we present some key findings that are especially pertinent to the focus of this book. Finally, we draw conclusions about the current state of PSM in the ‘network era’ on the basis of empirical evidence and evaluate the value of the network concept as a theoretical perspective for PSM research.

The network paradigm and public service media

The network paradigm has become popular in many academic disciplines in the social sciences in recent years. Its primary value lies in encouraging close examination of the “ties connecting any two, three or more individuals, organisations, or institutions” (Grote 2011: 2) rather than only analysing the individual characteristics of a research subject or object. Network theorists assume that looking at social relations is highly relevant because they are the “key to explain both individual actions and collective outcomes”, especially unexpected policy results (Schmidt 2007: 2-3).

In fact, however, our review of the literature found that the network paradigm has been applied in different and sometimes contradictory ways. Based on this review, we propose three ways in which the network paradigm can be useful for studying PSM: 1) to discuss how PSM embraces the internet, 2) to describe a more profound process of change affecting PSM, and 3) to locate PSM organisations in relation to national and international (stakeholder)-networks.

Some see the popularity of the network paradigm as mainly an academic trend triggered by new technical-analytical tools based on mathematics – i.e. network analysis. Rather than metaphorically saying that groups are ‘closely-knit’ or individuals ‘act in isolation’, researchers can use these new tools to quantify and verify clusters (Grote 2011; see also Watts 2004). In this perspective, the paradigm is not a ‘proper’ theory or even a new approach; it is a methodological toolbox for visualising ‘relational thinking’ that has a long tradition in the social sciences (Schmidt 2007: 2).

Another position suggests that the network paradigm has become popular because it helps making sense of an ongoing transformation of reality (Grote 2011; Pal 2011). In particular, some researchers started noticing new forms of political actions that challenge the historic tendency to prioritise centralised planning (Gibson 2007), actions that blur the line between public and private governance (Pal 2011). The idea and practice of stable policy networks with limited and controlled membership (normally governmental agencies, professionals, think tanks, and academics) are being replaced by rapidly changing, dynamic, and transnational “issue and protest networks” (Mingus 2017: 4).⁶

Researchers who don't normally study media and communications highlight the role of ICT in network building (e.g. Pal 2011: 4). Barry Gibson (2007: 2) describes how ICT has “enabled a significant increase in the capacity of networks [...] that are no longer bounded geographically”. Although the idea of a ‘social network’ has long been used to describe a group of people that are connected, thanks to ICT it has become a synonym for a variety of technical platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Weibo, etc.) that individuals use to share information (Ray 2009) or to organise bottom up politics (González-Bailón 2013).

Researchers with a specific interest in media organisations use the network paradigm, but not much in the sense of technical-analytical tools. The paradigm is used for qualitative network analysis as a way to analyse media governance (see Löblich & Pfaff-Rüdiger 2011 for an overview), and mainly as a theoretical approach or narrative to explain the disruptive transformations that affect media organisations as a consequence of digitalisation.

Some authors use network terminology to discuss how PSM should use the internet to facilitate social networks. Petros Iosifidis (2011) summarises the position of many critical scholars in this regard (e.g. Tambini & Cowling 2004; Lowe & Bardoeel 2007; Coleman & Blumler 2008). They argue that public service broadcasters are uniquely positioned to provide an ‘online public sphere’ because their remit prioritises universalism, they often have high credibility as a source of information, and they are financed by collective funding. However, to truly fill this role, the transition from public service broadcasting (PSB) to public service media (PSM) requires ‘reinventing’ the historical paradigm to enable becoming more democratic, interactive and decentralised organisations.

In essence, then, broadcasting organisations (including PSB) should not use the internet simply as another distribution channel, but rather to facilitate something new and needed in social networking. Eun Hwa Jung and Justin Walden (2015) conducted a survey of young college students in the USA. Based on the findings, they advise broadcasting managers to do more than stream TV programmes online if they want to survive the growing online competition. Graham Murdoch (2005) made an argument for the development of a ‘digital commons’, suggesting that PSM should join forces with other cultural organisations like libraries, museums and schools, interest groups, and movements to become a “central node in the network” of the new digital cultural commons. His thesis is updated in a chapter in the present book.

There are legal and competitive challenges, however, to the idea of PSM in this role. Karl-Heinz Ladeur and Tobias Gystomzyk (2014) show how the regulatory logic of linear broadcasting ‘clashes’ with the logic of non-linear communications networks. Using Eli Noams’ (1995) ‘network of networks’ term, with online advertising as their empirical case, they argue that the regulation of the online sphere is dominated by the logic of a “level playing field” advocated by a liberalised telecommunications sector, rather than the logic of broadcasting regulation that priorities creating a public sphere.

The ‘networked’ society or economy is also used as a way to describe structural change. As earlier mentioned, an important aspect of Castells’ theory of an emerging global network society hinges on changing power relations that contest the traditionally dominant role of national governments and legacy institutions. Benkler (2006) applied this idea to the media, arguing that in a networked information environment the internet decreases the costs of becoming a speaker in comparison with mass media. Benkler envisioned that mass media would be replaced by a wealth of decentralised communications networks in and through which information is circulated via multidirectional connections.

Interestingly, because of their reliance on industrial networking for electronic distribution, radio and TV stations in the USA have been (called) networks since the late 1920s. In this light, Amanda Lotz in her 2009 reader *Beyond Prime Time: Television Programming in the Post-Network Era* described the potential decline of the American TV industry as the ‘post-network-era’. At first glance, the contrast between the ‘networked’ and ‘post-network’ era is irritating, but after deeper reflection we realised it is not the term that marks the essential difference between the two eras. Rather, it is the question of how the network(s) – especially via the PSM organisations – can connect people in a fashion that seems ‘modern’ today: decentralised, multidirectional, and democratic.

Media scholars have also considered how journalism can successfully adapt to the ‘networked post-network’ environment. As early as 2001, Jo Bardoel and Mark Deuze introduced ‘network journalism’ to describe how traditional core competencies of journalists can converge with the ‘civic potential’ afforded online. They viewed network journalism as critical and ‘orientational’ storytelling for specific groups of audiences across media genres, types, or formats. Ten years later, Charlie Beckett and James Ball (2012) described how journalists are making use of emerging digital, interactive network structures – i.e. how they are successfully adapting. In discussing the case of WikiLeaks, they also point to ethical difficulties in such collaboration.

Without mentioning the internet, Otfried Jarren and colleagues conducted a study in 2001 on ‘networked’ PSM that compared regulation in Switzerland with five other countries. Based on Niklas Luhmanns’ system theory, they argued that PSM organisations are part of a network that consists of distinct but interconnected systems. In their view, the public enterprise is a vital part of the media system as such, but needs to curate ties with the political system (via its remit), the economic system (via its funding), and the society (via viewer councils). The study concluded that balance is key but hard to achieve. Ties to politics and economics are often too strong, and ties to society are generally too weak.

A recent contribution by Jessica Clark and Minna Aslama Horowitz (2014) focused on the American model for PSM, which is particularly networked in structure because it consists of hundreds of local independent channels. They argue for the importance of PSM taking a stakeholder approach for successful innovation, rather than having an isolated view on policy makers, professionals, citizens, funders and scholars separately. Public media managers, especially, need to grasp the interactions between stakeholders to be successful in public media reform efforts and innovation initiatives.

Although he mentions media organisations only in passing, Castells work invites deeper thought about PSM organisations beyond their immediate national environments as bigger or smaller 'nodes' in a 'global network society'. This idea is echoed in publications that discuss the transnational character of PSM, media policy, and the media industry. For example, Sandra Braman's (2010) chapter on an increasingly globalized public sphere challenges existing media policy frameworks, while Katherine Sarikakis (2010) argues the need for a more cosmopolitan organisation of PSM. A third example of research that conceptualises PSM in a transnational network are the studies that address the influence of 'big next-door neighbours' on small media markets (Puppis 2009; Trappel 2010; Lowe & Nissen 2011, see also the chapter in this book by Ruth McElroy and Caitriona Noonan). Small media systems suffer from scarce resources and small markets when competing with big neighbours, and are vulnerable to 'spill over' signals. Small media systems also depend on the media policy making of larger media systems. While these studies do not use the network paradigm to make their point, their arguments are undoubtedly based on relational thinking.

Thus, a variety of approaches and perspectives on networks and networking have been used over the years in efforts to deepen our understanding about changes not only in media but, importantly, in media-society relations. These approaches and perspectives comprise what can be generally described as 'the network paradigm' in media and communication studies. The paradigm is more complex and contradictory than is often recognised. It is obviously important for researching, analysing and considering the roles and functions of public service media in a 'networked society' – however conceived. The results of this literature review ground our (re)interpretation of empirical findings about commonalities and differences in the organisation of PSM in 17 Western countries.

Research design and methods

As earlier noted, our comparative study focused on identifying commonalities and differences in four main areas: formulation of the remit, regulation of public and commercial funding, current offers and market shares, and the most recent debates and reforms (see table 1 below). Our research design consisted of two methods: First, we conducted a qualitative analysis of documents (see Karppinen & Moe 2012). The sample consisted of media laws and decrees, annual reports of PSM organisations, and

structural data for 17 Western countries. Second, we invited country experts – scholars with expertise in media policy research – to validate and complement our findings, and to point out ongoing policy debates.

As outlined in the literature review, the network perspective offers three main starting points for interpreting the data. The aspect of embracing the internet is covered by the definition of the remit for non-linear services, by new funding models, and by the supply and demand of online services. The aspect of change is covered largely by the reforms and debates section. The aspect of PSM's national and global networks is implicitly present across categories. Stakeholders are involved in all activities of PSM: As audiences, as decision-makers, or as participants in debates and reforms. Market shares, or levels of funding also indicate PSM's position in national and global networks. However, as we will discuss in the conclusion section, especially the third aspect would gain from further, more directed research.

Table 1. Categories used for document analysis

Remit
Definition for linear services
Definition for non-linear services
Accountability mechanisms
Funding
Funding model (public & commercial funding)
Finances (licence fees/household levy, public and commercial revenues)
Regulation (decision making process, advertising rules for online and offline)
Supply and Demand
Radio stations (name, programme/target group, market share)
TV stations (name, programme/target group, market share)
Online services
Reforms and Debates
Current reforms and debates

Findings of our study on public service media

As indicated, we treat the findings in four aspects and do so in the order of presentation in Table 1. We therefore begin with comparative findings about the PSM remit.

The PSM remit

The remits for PSM vary in length and are invariably aligned with the national context. Nonetheless, they typically include three elements: genres (e.g. information, educa-

tion, or culture), goals and functions (e.g. inclusion, participation, national identity), and characteristics of journalistic practice (e.g. innovative, balanced, impartial). While all 17 countries feature a universal remit, some have more than one organisation, including some that are mandated to serve specific minority groups (e.g. SBS in Australia). Another characteristic that is quite common is the existence of a quota for proportions of specific content or languages. A quota for the inclusion of work made by independent producers is a third way remits seek to strengthen PSM's ties, in this case with the broad cultural industry.

All countries in our sample included online and non-linear services in PSM's remit. This is legitimated in different ways: that PSM needs to 'follow the technological development' generally, or they should 'apply the remit in a "modern" way', or they need to 'reach their audience on all distribution channels'. In some countries, the remit states that PSM's online and non-linear services are subject to the same rules as their broadcasting channels (e.g. Australia and Wallonia in Belgium), or that the European Audio-visual Media Services Directive (AVMS-D) applies (e.g. Finland, Ireland, and the Netherlands). At the time of this study, Norway was the only country with specific list of genres for PSM online services.

PSM remits routinely differentiate between live and on-demand streaming of broadcast content on the one hand, and 'additional services' on the other. In several countries, providing on-demand streaming is either compulsory for PSM (e.g. Flanders, Denmark and France), or explicitly permitted or encouraged (e.g. Germany, Norway, Austria, and MTS in New Zealand). While most countries do not restrict on-demand services, a few (Austria, Germany and the UK) impose time limits (see Table 2). Furthermore, PSM organisations often inform audiences and users about restrictions on sport broadcasting, movies and series due to intellectual property rights that prohibit streaming.

Table 2. Restriction for non-linear provision of radio and TV programming

Maximum 7 days	Maximum 30 days	No limit
AT, DE	UK	AU, BE, CA, CH, DK, FI, IE, IT, NL, NZ, SE, UK, USA

Additional services are most strictly regulated in the German-speaking countries. In Switzerland, a clear link to radio and TV programming is compulsory. In Germany, the online presence of PSM must differ from online newspapers, despite delivering current affairs and daily news. In several other countries (e.g. Australia, Flanders, Wallonia in Belgium, Germany, France and Norway), PSM is encouraged to use or provide interactive services such as blogs or fora, or to be active on social media. Some PSM organisations have also established self-regulatory documents for user-generated-content, or for their staffs' use of social media (e.g. Australia, Finland, and the BBC).

Many European countries now apply *ex ante* tests in deciding about the public value and market impact of potential new services before introducing them (see Table 3). Aside from procedural aspects, these tests vary according to the actors executing the test and taking decisions. In most cases, public value tests require a public consultation. Additionally, PSM organisations are held accountable by outside stakeholders in a variety of ways: Via annual reports (all of them), via self-committing strategy documents (e.g. Australia, Canada, Finland, Ireland, Norway and the UK), via evaluations (e.g. Austria, Flanders, Finland, France, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and the UK), or via compulsory surveys of viewer satisfaction (e.g. Italy, US).

Table 3. Ex-ante-tests

	Execution	Decision	Consultation
AT	Regulator	Regulator	Public hearing
BE/CF	Independent experts appointed by regulator	Independent experts appointed by regulator	Public hearing
BE/VG	Regulator	Government	Diverse
DE	TV- resp. Broadcasting Council	TV- resp. Broadcasting Council	–
FI	Yle Board	Yle Board	Specific actors
IE	Regulator, Broadcasting Minister	Broadcasting Minister	‘Affected’ parties
NO	Regulator, Competition Agency	Ministry of Culture	Interest groups
SE	Regulator	Regulator	–
UK	BBC Trust, Regulator	BBC Trust	Diverse, public hearing

Funding

Most PSM organisations receive mixed funding from public and commercial revenues (see Table 4). Only the Nordic countries, the UK, and the USA do not allow PSM organisations to sell advertising airtime or space online. In most European countries, public funding is collected via a license fee while all non-European countries in our sample allocate public money from the tax budget. There are exceptions in Europe, i.e. the Flemish and French communities of Belgium, and the Netherlands abandoned the licence fee system and allocate money from the tax budget. France combines both funding models.

Most countries with a traditional license fee were or are debating a change of funding modus. At the time of our study, two countries had introduced new models: Finland replaced the license fee with a broadcasting tax that is a percentage of one’s individual tax and imposes a fee on companies above a certain threshold of income. Germany applied a levy on every household regardless of the technical device used to access the services. In a 2015 referendum vote, the Swiss approved a parliamentary decision to introduce a similar household levy by 2019. As both levy and broadcasting

Table 4. Funding models

	Licence fee	Household levy	Broadcasting tax	General tax
Advertising permitted	AT	CH (SRG TV)*	–	AU (SBS)
	FR	DE (ARD, ZDF)		BE/CF
	IE (RTÉ)			BE/VG (VRT Radio)
	IT			CA (CBC TV)
				FR
Advertising not permitted				IE (TG4)
				NL
				NZ (TVNZ)
	DK	CH (SRG Radio)*	FI	AU (ABC)
	NO	DE (DRadio)		BE/VG
	SE			(VRT TV)
	UK			CA (CBC Radio)
				NZ (RNZ)
				USA

Comments: *) Currently still a license fee, however, a household levy was recently decided by Parliament and approved in a public vote.

tax include many previous non-payers, the change reduces the individual amounts paid in both countries. In Germany, the amount was lowered from € 215.76 to € 210 Euro; in Switzerland, the government promised to reduce the amount from 462 to 400 Swiss Francs.

A comparison of total revenues, and of the fees collected for PSM, shows considerable variance between countries. PSM in large countries (e.g. ARD in Germany, BBC in the UK, France Télévisions, and Rai in Italy) have a much higher budget at their disposal than PSM organisations in small countries (see Figure 1). Moreover, inhabitants of small countries like Denmark and Switzerland pay license fees of more than €300 Euro, while inhabitants of bigger countries like France and Italy are charged less than €150 Euro. However, these differences are moderated by proportionate levels of economic prosperity. When adjusted for average European purchasing power, the Danish and the Swiss license fees are more comparable to other countries.

Another difference is the ratio between public and commercial revenues. The share of public funding is generally above 60 per cent for PSM, with the highest percentage in the Nordic countries and the UK. Non-European countries invest less public funding in PSM, as most evident in New Zealand and the USA. TV New Zealand is fully commercial. In the USA, spot advertising is not allowed but PSM depends heavily on sponsorship (called 'underwriting').³ In 2014, Austria, Canada, and Ireland received a considerable amount of PSM income from advertising and sponsorship.

Revenues from online advertising account only for a small fraction of advertising income where this is allowed. Of the countries that disclosed these figures in 2013, the highest shares (about 5.4 per cent) were at Austria's ORF (11.4M of 208M Euros), and

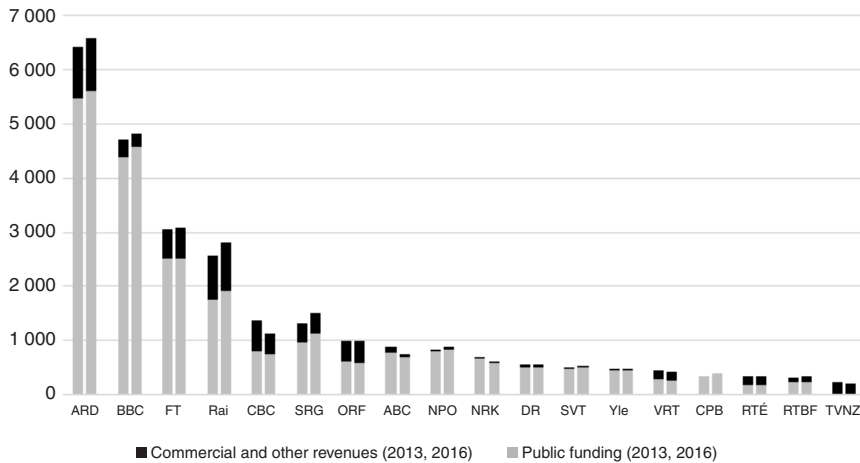


Figure 1. Revenues of public service media in 2013 and 2016 (millions of EUR)

Source: Annual reports of PSM organisations

by Ireland's RTÉ (5.9M of 105.8M Euros). Typically, regulation of online advertising is aligned with the regulation of offline advertising. However, in France, Germany, and Switzerland, PSM online platforms are restricted from advertising, despite being allowed on their broadcasting channels.

Supply and demand

The public service media organisations in our sample offer, on average, seven radio and five TV channels, as well as online services. Public radio stations normally reach between 50-80 per cent of the domestic population. These radio channels are very popular in the Nordic countries, Austria, and Switzerland, but play more marginal roles in Australia, Canada, France, Italy, New Zealand and the USA. Public TV channels typically have market shares between 20-40 per cent (see Figure 2). Finland's Yle scores highest, while CBC's English-speaking services reach less than 10 per cent. When comparing our data of 2013 with the more recent figures of the European Broadcasting Union⁴, we can see both increases and decreases of market shares.

Aside from radio and TV channels, PSM organisations also offer online services. These normally include a website with current affairs, live streaming of broadcasting channels, and on-demand services. Furthermore, PSM often provide 'additional services' like apps and curate social media sites (e.g. on Facebook, or Twitter). Market shares of PSM's online services are increasing generally, but we found it difficult to obtain comparable data and can't comment on an empirical basis at this point.

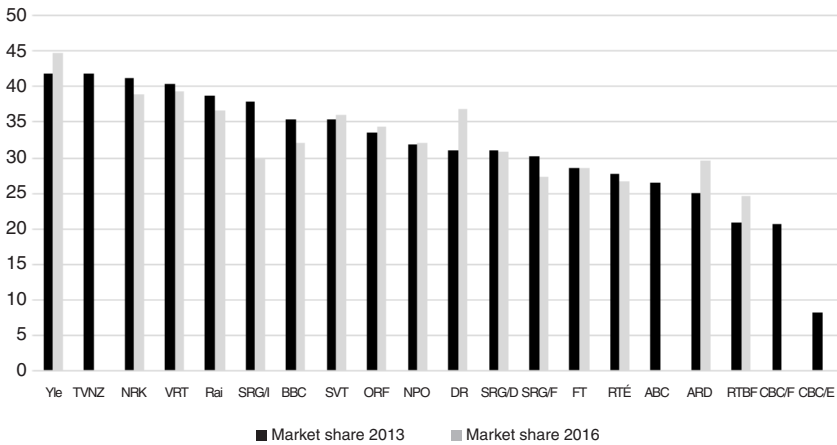


Figure 2. Market share of public service TV in 2013 and 2016 (per cent)

Source: Authors' analysis (2013), European Broadcasting Union (2016)

Debate and reform

At the time of our study, many PSM organisations were troubled by deteriorating financial conditions. In Australia, Canada, Flanders, the Netherlands and New Zealand, public funding cuts had just taken place. This caused layoffs and the discontinuation of programmes or services. Financial complications were mostly keyed to the economic and financial crisis of 2008 that led to austerity programmes as governments cut budgets, including for PSM organisations that receive funding from general taxes. The financial crisis combined with the structural transformation of media markets keyed to digitalisation and online media growth have also led to decreasing advertising revenues. PSM in Canada and Ireland were heavily affected.

PSM were also under political pressure from political parties in many countries that advocate for a narrower remit and lower financial resources. In Canada, Ireland, and the Netherlands, proposals were brought forward that PSM should only cover genres that are affected by commercial market failure. In the UK, the Tory government took several decisions that tighten the BBC's latitude for action. On the one hand, a discontinuation of license fee exemption for those over 75-years of age was decided. On the other hand, the BBC is now required to fund its World Service from its own budget and to top slice revenues for S4C and local stations.

Private media are also affected by the general economic situation and structural changes, of course, and often complain about 'market distortion' caused by PSM online. Newspaper publishers (especially in Finland and Switzerland) harshly criticise PSM online activities as well as their comparatively stable financial situation because of public funding. In Norway and Sweden, existing public value tests were under scru-

tiny at the time of our study. In Flanders, the quota for investments in independent productions was raised to support the local film industry.

PSM in France and Germany were better off at the time of the study. ARD and ZDF had announced increased financial needs to the body in charge of deciding the fee levels. It seemed possible the additional revenues gained by the change from licence fees to a household levy will be used for this purpose. Furthermore, a new PSM youth programme online was planned. In France, the planned end of advertising on France Télévisions in 2016 was stopped by President Hollande. He also raised taxes on telecommunications providers to support PSM.

In many countries, technological change has fuelled political debate about funding models. Following the introduction of a household fee in Germany and Switzerland, and a broadcasting tax in Finland, the license fee system is now under scrutiny in other countries. In Ireland, a decision was made in favour of a household fee, but the introduction was postponed. In Austria, the government may consider this, but would not debate the issue in the current legislative period. In Denmark, Norway and Sweden, discussions on alternative financing models were underway. In the UK, a household fee was discussed in the current charter renewal process, but is unlikely to be implemented until a later stage – if implemented.

Governance reform is also on the agenda for some of the PSM organisations in our sample. Although outside the scope of our study, country correspondents brought attention to reform debates in Italy, France and the United Kingdom. In Italy, the government planned a comprehensive reform of RAI and its functioning. In France, the appointment of the Director for the PSM organisations was depoliticised. In the UK, a reform of the BBC Trust was expected as part of charter renewal. In Canada and the United States, questions of broadcasting distribution were an important topic for PSM. Some channels of the CBC were losing their ‘must-carry-status’ in Canadian cable networks. In the USA, a planned reallocation of the frequency spectrum could lead to shortage in supply.

Conclusion: Public service media in the ‘network’ era

In this chapter, we presented selected findings of a comparative international study of PSM. The research sought to detect commonalities and differences between 17 Western countries and their PSM organisations in four main areas. As many scholars (see Donders 2012), we premised our study on the ‘digital age’ construct to describe the circumstances for PSM. In the current (re)interpretation of findings, we premised our analysis on the ‘network era’ construct. In the conclusion, we specifically address the findings from the network perspective.

As discussed, a network perspective can indicate a methodological, theoretical or practical point of view. Based on our review of the literature applying the network paradigm to PSM, we suggested three ways of using the term: 1) to discuss how PSM

embraces the internet, 2) to describe a more profound process of change that affects PSM, and 3) to locate PSM in national or international (stakeholder)-networks. In what follows, we interpret our findings in the light of these three perspectives, and compare the 'digital age' and the 'network era' constructs. We close by considering steps for further research.

Our study provides an overview of the ways in which PSM organisations are embracing the internet. All studied countries have online and non-linear services as part of their remits, and some have changed their funding models to account for digital distribution. For all the PSM organisations, online and non-linear services are increasingly popular. But there are limits to these efforts. Many European countries have introduced *ex ante* tests to assess the public value and market impact of potential new services. German-speaking countries have set stricter rules than elsewhere for non-linear services. Intellectual property rights are a key aspect in establishing boundaries. We can therefore conclude that PSM is networked in the sense that they are embracing the internet as a network of networks, but there are regulatory limits that can become barriers to further future development.

Our findings offer insights on the ways PSM is affected by the general change in media and society. As described by Castells (2011), technology and globalisation cause a shift in power relations. A complicating factor is the financial crisis of 2008 that has affected PSM in many countries. Both phenomena indicate that PSM is already grappling with the global network society he describes. PSM linear programming is losing market shares in some countries, and advertising revenues are increasing for businesses that rely on ICT. Despite challenges, PSM remains popular and important in many countries. The popularity of PSM's websites indicate they have successfully applied 'network journalism', especially. This contradicts Benkler's (2006) claim that legacy media will become obsolete in the network economy, although the funding for PSM is certainly more complicated and uncertain. We can conclude that although we (might) live in a global network society, this does not necessarily mean the end of PSM or the full-blown reality of a 'post-network era'.

Finally, our study illustrates that PSM organisations are embedded in national and global networks. Based on Jarren et al. (2001), we can say that PSM has always been 'networked' entities because their regulatory status and mandates prescribe various ties to diverse parts of society: via quotas for certain content and languages, via decision-making processes, and via public and commercial revenue streams. Low market shares and ongoing political debates about PSM show, however, that these networks include competitors and adversaries. Following Clark and Aslama Horowitz (2014), PSM should invest in stakeholder management, *especially* with the public. We can therefore conclude that PSM needs to understand their 'embeddedness' and carefully curate ties – not only content.

This chapter reveals the network paradigm as a very broad perspective, as especially evident in the two terms that are most used to describe the current situation of PSM – 'digital age' and 'network era'. The two overlap, particularly on one point:

PSM's need to technically and socially adapt to ICTs. The network paradigm per se invites one to think more deeply about the ties between entities and how those links affect the public enterprise in media – with or without ICT involvement. While the 'digital age' might consider such relations implicitly, the network paradigm addresses them explicitly. It is therefore no surprise that our study that was premised on the 'digital age' provides compelling findings on the aspect of embracing ICTs, and only an unsystematic illustration of PSM's social relations. The latter is extremely important because it is about the public dimension and the service orientation.

Using a network perspective to (re)interpret our data was fruitful. It not only encouraged consideration of how relational thinking is already an ingredient of many studies, but offered useful starting points for further examination. One is the practices of network journalism in PSM. Another is the network of PSM and its various stakeholders. Such research could investigate the impact of public hearings on ex ante tests, or the impact of parliaments in decision-making about PSM funding. To investigate these ties more systematically, beyond the case study level, one could also use mathematical-technical tools for network analysis.

Notes

1. Puppis, Manuel & Schweizer, Corinne (2015). *Service public im internationalen Vergleich. Schlussbericht zuhanden des Bundesamtes für Kommunikation (BAKOM)* [Service public in an international comparison. Final Report to the Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM)]. This study was funded by the OFCOM.
2. The countries included were: Austria, Australia, Canada, the Flemish and French part of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, and US. Normally the PSM organisation(s) that is/are denoted as PSM in the regulatory framework of the country is/are included in the analysis.
3. Gathering the data from sponsoring in the US was outside of this projects' scope.
4. We are grateful to the European Broadcasting Union for providing market shares of PSM 2016. Our methodology of data collection might differ from the EBU's in single cases.

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The Feasibility of a Public Service Orientation in the Western Balkans

Complications for a 'Networked Society' in an Illiberal Context

Davor Marko

Abstract

Public media organisations in the Western Balkans are undergoing a complex transition from a history of state controlled media to become independent public service media. Despite considerable effort and expense, it has not gone as hoped in most cases. This chapter analyses contextual factors that are common to the seven countries of this region that affect developing a genuine public service orientation in media policies and performance. By better understanding historical legacies, inadequate technological development and late entry into digitalisation, and problems rooted in economic underdevelopment and clientelism, the prognosis for the emergence of 'networked societies' under illiberal conditions is at least tardy and perhaps impractical in the foreseeable future, at least. Contextual factors prioritise a set of values that greatly complicate the development of public service broadcasting in technological and democratic terms, much less the even more complex transition to public service media.

Keywords: public service broadcasting, public service media, digitalisation, democratisation, media capture, state broadcasting, clientelism

Introduction

The European Union clarified its political interest in the Western Balkan (WB) region in the 2003 Thessaloniki Declaration. The EU confirmed their view of the region as a "European perspective" and promised full membership for these countries after they have accomplished stipulated criteria, which include transforming state broadcasting institutions into public service broadcasting (PSB). This transformation is considered crucial for democratisation. In efforts to fulfil the requirement, WB countries have pursued models and standards for PSB as practiced in Western Europe. Regrettably, these efforts have produced disappointing results.

The point of departure for this chapter hinges on the 'network paradigm' theme that grounds the book, a paradigm that is generally considered to be of great importance for an emerging media-society context in which public service media (PSM) should operate. This chapter analyses the degree to which that paradigm is realistic or even

relevant in the WB region, and discusses characteristic challenges generated by the paradigm in the light of three key contextual features:

1. Legacy media systems and critical junctures that describe WB regional history, which established values and an overall cultural orientation that continues to shape these societies and their media systems.
2. The difficulty of realistically pursuing the development of a networked society construction due to underdevelopment in technological infrastructure.
3. Complications that compound this pursuit that are caused by economic disadvantages which limit investment capital and expose legacy media institutions to clientelistic arrangements and political colonisation – especially, but not exclusively, in the public sector.

Taken together, these features account for ‘illiberal democracies’ that hinder participatory democracy and constrain the potential for a public service orientation in media. As result, ‘public’ broadcasters in WB countries cannot embrace the new media logic and co-related values that are keyed to digitalisation in programme production and distribution, effective use of online platforms for citizen interaction, and creativity that pursues innovation in every aspect of service and operations. Moreover, most broadcast programmes from ‘public’ broadcasters in the region are not widely trusted or popular, and as a whole their channels have lost audiences. Public sector broadcasting is (rightly) perceived by most people in this region as an instrument of partisan politics wielded by elites, and generally regarded as technological laggards when compared with commercial actors (Marko 2016). The situation we are describing begs an essential question that threads its way through all discussion and debate about PSB in the WB region: Why do these media exist, and what is their actual purpose?

In this chapter, analysis is based on everyday practice in the region to demonstrate why and how the network society paradigm is incompatible with illiberal democracies. I base the analysis on the concept of ‘competitive authoritarianism’ to clarify the context. This concept has three important dimensions that all apply to countries in the WB region. First, democratic institutions exist but rules are not enforced. Second, election outcomes are taken seriously by incumbents and political opponents alike, but manipulation is routine and expected (Levitsky & Way 2010). Third, institutional resources and mechanisms for citizens are weak and subordinate to the interests of a ruling elite (Vladisavljević 2016). The condition of competitive authoritarianism accounts for atavistic tendencies in which public institutions of all types, especially media, are captured by political elites for their own self-interested purposes.

This chapter contributes to the book theme in two ways. First, I interrogate the realities and potential utility of the networked society notion in the context of the Western Balkan region – a region not often considered in earlier RIPE Readers. Second, I consider the complexity of challenges involved with developing a public service orientation per se in societies with histories and conditions that greatly complicate

democratic development – a set of realities that describe a large part of the world today. My approach departs from the more typical orientation that favours highly normative expectations and is often focused on the preservation of heritage broadcasting systems. In this region, there is no heritage of that sort to protect.

Three contextual factors that limit a public service orientation

As noted, three contextual factors inhibit developing a public service orientation in the WB region as a whole: 1) history and path dependencies, 2) technological underdevelopment, and 3) relative poverty that facilitates clientelistic ties between politics, business and media. I treat each factor in turn.

History and path dependency

Seven countries comprise the Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. All seven were socialist countries under Communist Party rule until 1991. Except for Albania, they were member states that comprised the former Yugoslavia.

After independence, each country began efforts to build liberal democracies. Ekiert (1999) believes the legacy of socialism and the wars that followed independence explain failures to achieve this. Peruško (2013, 2016) believes historic traits and formative events are crucial for analysis of media system development in this region and account for failures to realise a public service orientation in media policies. Her historical institutionalist approach complements the more typical normative approach to analyses of media systems that too often neglect historically-rooted distinctions. Her approach hinges on two key concepts: 1) critical juncture and path dependency for analysing longitudinal developments, and 2) formative events that affect continuity or discontinuity for institutional development. Peruško (2016) highlights three critical historic junctures in the WB region: 1) modernisation in the nineteenth century, 2) socialist rule after World War II, and 3) the post-socialist democratic transition. These are the formative periods that shaped the situation today.

Modernisation in this region started in the nineteenth century, and thus came later than elsewhere in Europe. Croatia and Slovenia (combined at the time) were the most developed. Croatia was the richest and the first newspapers were published there. Slovenia had the largest industrial production capacity (followed by Croatia) and the highest literacy rates. Only 9 per cent of the population was illiterate, while the figure for Macedonia was 84 per cent, the populations in today's Bosnia and Herzegovina were 80 per cent illiterate, Montenegro was at 67 per cent, Serbia at 64 per cent, and Croatia at 32 per cent (Peruško 2016). The better situation for Croatia and Slovenia hinges on a significant cultural divide between these states as part of the Austro-Hungarian empire while the rest were part of Ottoman Empire.

The second critical juncture is the experience of Yugoslavian socialism from 1945 until the 1991. Compared with Albania under Hoxha and Romania under Ceaușescu, Yugoslavia enjoyed a 'lighter touch' as a member of the non-aligned movement, and was always considered 'a maverick state' that was not strictly in the West or the East (Ramet 1995). Self-management was characteristic of Yugoslavian socialism, which allowed workers to participate in decision-making (although they were excluded from decisions of fundamental importance – for example, appointing Directors was the exclusive purview of the Communist Party). Of course, co-governing and consulting in decisions about firm operations is not the same as participation in societal governance (Lydall 1989), although there was a belief that proved to be naïve that self-management at the firm level would encourage decentralisation of decision making at the societal level (Woodward 1995). Nevertheless, Peruško (2016) sees the socialist period as an integrative influence on political and economic conditions for media development in the former Yugoslavian republics that account for their relatively higher technological sophistication and more critical orientation than other countries in eastern Europe in this era. Despite this, disparities between the most developed Yugoslav republics (Croatia and Slovenia) and the rest continually increased and there was considerable poverty.

The third juncture followed the collapse of Yugoslavia when the focus shifted to democratisation efforts and becoming EU member states. With the exception of Slovenia, however, this period was damaged by the worst conflicts since World War II (Croatia 1990 – 1995; Bosnia and Herzegovina 1992 – 1995; Serbia and Kosovo 1999, and Macedonia 2001). In this conflict-ridden situation, state-controlled media continued to be an important instrument for propaganda, which severely damaged trust in these institutions and have since been an important obstacle to their transformation into PSM.

I provide two examples. Radio-Television Serbia (RTS) was tightly controlled by the government of Slobodan Milošević (Veljanovski 2005). After his fall, RTS embarked on a PSM transformation project, but had a badly wounded reputation that have so far prevented much success. In Croatia, the Democratic Union controlled HRT by various means during the war, imposing stifling regulations and installing politically-appointed managers and editors, as well as exerting control over content and mandating instructions for how journalists should report from the battlefield (Thompson 1995; Kurspahić 2003). None of the private TV stations had a significant share of the audience, which left HRT a *de facto* monopoly. It was only after political changes in Serbia and Croatia in 2000 that any real possibility for reforming state-controlled media became realistic. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the war legacy was institutionalised in an organisational structure for public broadcasting that reflects territorial and political divisions. As result, BHRT is weakened by huge financial debt and lacks political support. The legitimacy of two entities, Federal RTV for the Muslim-Croats and RTRS for the Serbs, depend directly on their political affiliations. Thus, regional history and engrained path dependencies are significant factors constraining the development of a public service orientation.

Technological underdevelopment

The second contextual factor points to the need for a digital technological infrastructure that is a prerequisite for building a networked society. In the WB region, this is underdeveloped. Although investment during the socialist period created a reasonably good technological basis, the infrastructure was devastated by war and later development was stymied. Broadcasting in Yugoslavia was decentralised with an umbrella organisation, the Yugoslav Radio-Television (YRT) co-ordinating programme exchanges between broadcasters in the member republics. Each enjoyed considerable autonomy in programming and production, in selecting staff and collecting funding. Croatia had the best technical infrastructure. HRT's headquarter building was constructed in 1986 and served as the EBU exchange centre for Yugoslavia. In the socialist period, the Serbian broadcaster, RTS, had a respected reputation for providing good informative and documentary programmes. Certainly, the Communist Party influenced how information was selected in all these countries, and imposed a degree of control on media, but an important positive legacy was the license fee model for financing, which was only maintained after independence by Croatia.

War damage and the poverty that followed crippled incentives for new media development. Most WB broadcasters still have little capacity to expand their offerings and no domestic technology companies are leaders in setting industry standards. There has been little demand from mobile operators to secure spectrum space (Broughton Micova, forthcoming). The main drivers for digitalisation and technical improvement are still external deadlines set by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and the EU, and problems with signal interference from neighbouring states (Milosavljevič & Broughton Micova 2013). Only Croatia and Slovenia completed the transition to digital broadcasting before the deadline for EU member states in 2012, while the ITU deadline of June 2015 is still unmet by BiH and Kosovo. These countries were especially ravaged by war and were not completely self-governing for years afterwards. Both still suffer from fragile state-building processes and view switchover to digital terrestrial television (DTT) with a scepticism that is reinforced by the complicated experiences in neighbouring countries (Ahmetašević & Hadžiristić 2017; Miftari 2017).

Switchover depends on support from the state or the EU. In Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro, the aid recipient was a public network operator that was set up from a divestiture of the former links and transmissions department of state broadcasting organisations that were supposed to become PSB. There are no direct subsidies for infrastructure in Croatia, but the DTT network operator is also a public company. Public network operators facilitate efforts to fulfil universal coverage obligations, including the need to reach about 15 per cent of the Croat population that lives in mountainous areas. Public network operators serve a genuine public interest need in providing access to digital signals where the commercial value of DTT is low. In Serbia and Macedonia, many local and regional broadcasters believe it is not worth paying the

Table 1. Overview of switchover process in the countries completing before the ITU 2015 deadline

	Aid to PSB	Aid for infrastructure	Campaign	Consumer subsidy
Croatia	Tender waived for MUX access	None	Yes	20-50 % cost of STB
Serbia	Dedicated space on MUX1	Yes, inc. EU IPA funds	Yes, inc. with EU IPA funds	Yes, for vulnerable
Macedonia	1 MUX dedicated	Yes, state budget covered PSB MUX	Yes	Yes, for vulnerable and obligations on private MUX
Montenegro	Dedicated space on MUX1	Yes, inc. EU IPA funds	Yes	Yes, for vulnerable

Source: Broughton Micova (forthcoming)

fees for free-to-air DTT transmission (Milosavljević & Broughton Micova 2013). Given low dependence on DTT and weak media markets in the region, one should expect only declining interest from commercial players. Nevertheless, “the public interest in maintaining a publicly owned DTT network might warrant continued operation as a form of public service media provision” (Broughton Micova forthcoming).

Economic disadvantages and clientelism

The third contextual factor is the biggest obstacle for building networked societies in WB countries: clientelism. The transition to liberal democracy was gravely wounded by wars that have taken a heavy toll on infrastructure and human life. Instead of being a trustworthy arbiter in local affairs, the state in this region has become a resource for political parties and oligarchs (Zielonka & Mancini 2011). This accounts for widespread clientelism, which is a form of societal structure where “access to social resources is controlled by patrons, and community resources are allocated to clients, in exchange for various types of support” (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos 2002: 11). Compared with EU averages, WB countries are at the bottom across indicators of economic development (Table 2). Kosovo has the lowest GDP rate among all European countries, with high unemployment and net salaries that are four to five times lower than the EU average.

Economic development is aggravated by small market sizes and far less overall revenue availability and potential in WB media markets. The best off is Croatia, but only in comparative terms.

Public broadcasters throughout the region are affected by poor economic conditions in two ways. First, they must partly rely on advertising money and commercial incomes that are also regulated by EU rules on state aid. Second, poverty discourages a large proportion of citizens from paying the license fee or taxes needed to fund PSB. As a result, they pursue alternative funding which tends to be commercial and contradicts what many consider an essential normative principle of PSB. In practice, public broadcasters are thereby exposed to political and corporate pressures resulting from heavy reliance on advertising, which strengthens ties with governing parties, state

Table 2. Indicators of economic development in the Western Balkan countries

	Population size in million (2015)	GDP/per capita in \$ (2016)	Unemploy- ment rate (2016)	Average salary net in EUR (2017)	Media market size in mil \$ (2016, 2017)
Albania	2.9	4.1	17	330	45.8
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3.8	4.7	43	440	52.3
Croatia	4.2	12.1	17	813	315
Kosovo	1.8	3.7	30	330	N/A
Macedonia	2.1	5.2	27	372	36.2
Montenegro	0.6	6.7	14	512	12
Serbia	7.1	5.3	19	404	193
EU	510	25.6	8	1.520	N/A

Sources: World Bank (2016, 2017); www.tradingeconomics.com; multiple sources; IREX Media Sustainability Index (2016, 2017).

advertisers and other media operators. For example, in Serbia most media, including RTS, sell advertising through marketing agencies and key personnel in these agencies are closely tied to the former and the incumbent Presidents of Serbia and their political parties (Marko 2017a). Significant indirect political influence is the result, which was further aggravated by direct state funding for PSB from 2014 to 2016 for RTS. The same pertains to Kosovo and Montenegro.

The situation is similar to what we have seen in Hungary and Poland in recent years, where the “anti-system proto-hegemonic parties have in recent years taken offices” (Bajomi-Lazar, forthcoming). This is evident in the government of Vučić in Serbia, ethno-political parties in a coalition in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Đukanović who has ruled Montenegro for 27 years. Following electoral victory in 2015, the conservative Croatian Democratic Union government dismissed the entire management and editorial board of HRT and installed “ideologically suitable” personalities. Decreased quality and a plunging level of trust have resulted (Marko 2017a). These examples indicate a deviated role for PSB: instead of being a tool for conflict management, they become a mirror for and enhancement of political and ideological conflict. The situation is generalisable for all seven countries of the WB region.

As data from the IREX Media Sustainability Index indicate (Figure 1), the ‘golden age’ of media development was between 2001 to 2005 and coincided with political stability, steady economic growth and ‘EUphoria’. The situation today is in sharp retrograde as political and business actors have colonised all public and state resources which decreasing media freedom, degrading professionalism, and stagnation rather than innovation. The collapse has been especially pronounced since 2008 due to the global financial crisis that has fuelled political instability. This decline has regional implications and ramifications for the EU; we are not discussing a problem confined to WB countries.

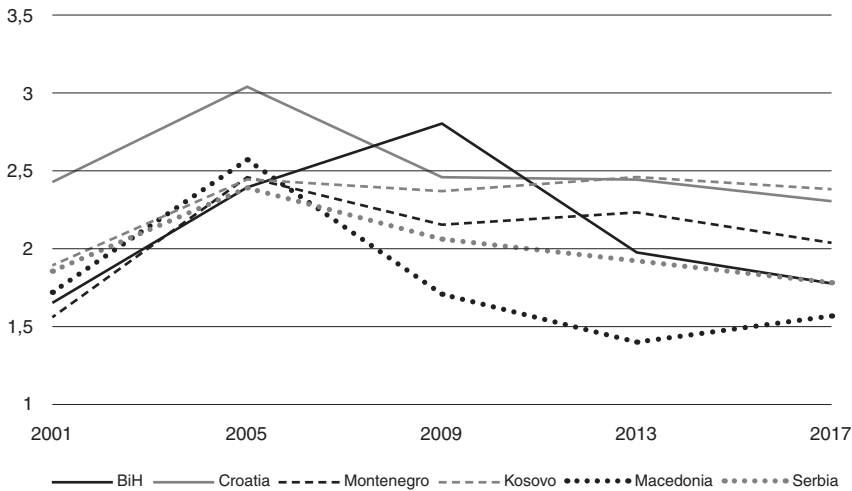


Figure 1. Comparative insight on the state of development of media sector in the Western Balkan countries

Sources: IREX Media Sustainability Index (2001 – 2017); www.policyhub.net

PSB institutions are in the vanguard of general efforts to colonise public resources. The omnipresence of political party influences, explained by the weakness of trade unions, professional bodies, and civil society organisations, has undermined independence in public service television especially. Parties select managers based on political rather than professional criteria. As a result, public media managers are not independent professionals but party servants. Institutional guarantees are specified on paper to safeguard editorial independence and political impartiality, but have no basis in reality. Political parties play the leading role in formulating regulations, as well, and very often informal rules override formal laws. Public resources, especially for programming and from advertising, are channelled to party clients via public service television money in exchange for various services rendered to the parties (Bajomi Lazar forthcoming).

The failure of imitative transformation

Attempts to transition former state broadcasters to PSB have been described by Slavko Splichal (2001) as “imitative transformation”. Research shows how unrealistic it has been to think a successful model elsewhere could be transplanted into a different context and flourish in the absence of enabling contextual factors (Berkowitz et al. 2003; Kumar 2006; Irion & Jusić 2014). The project was premised on a normative approach that expects these countries to adhere to Western European standards and principles for PSB policy. Local contexts and distinctive characteristics have been largely

neglected. Moreover, all these countries were approached uniformly (Jakubowicz & Sükösd 2008; Voltmer 2013). The EU and international media development agencies exerted pressure through the mechanism of ‘conditionality’, whereby candidate countries must show steady progress in fulfilling a set of normative criteria to be eventually awarded EU state membership. WB countries have pursued this when in their favour, but performed differently as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Public broadcasters in the Western Balkan countries – an overview

Country	Broadcaster	Established (by law)	Main source of funding	Annual budget (mil EUR)	Popularity of programs
Albania	RTSH	1998	License fee	16.4	Low
	BHRT (national)	2002	License fee	12	Low
Bosnia and Herzegovina	FRTV (entity)	2002	Marketing	No data for license fee 6 (marketing)	High
	RTRS (entity)	2002	Licensee fee + government subsidies	6-7	Medium
Croatia	HRT	1990	License fee	186.47	Medium
Kosovo	RTK	1999	Budget	8 – 12	Medium
Macedonia	MRT	1997	Tax	21.5	Low
Montenegro	RTCG	2002	Budget	16	Medium
Serbia	RTS (national)	2002	Tax	55.76	High
	RTV (province)	2002	Tax	n / a	Low

Source: www.analitika.ba.

In Serbia and Croatia, transformation started after 2000 when these countries reached a suitable degree of political maturity to break ties with authoritarian regimes (Marko 2017a). In Croatia, HRT was established on the legacy of the socialist era broadcaster with continuity in infrastructure and the funding model, and has been, perhaps surprisingly, the most successful in the region (Mezulić 2016; Marko 2017). In Serbia, authorities built PSB on a reform that was discontinuous with past experience because the broadcaster was so misused for propaganda during the war. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Kosovo, the transformation process has been completely driven by the international community (Ahmetašević & Hadžiristić 2017; Miftari 2017). Macedonia and Bosnia are peculiar because the structure of their broadcasters intentionally reflects ethnic cleavages and political divisions.

The chief problem overall is lack of an actual public service orientation (i.e. lack of those values as a priority in practice) and the continuing dominance of a heritage broadcasting paradigm (i.e., retarded development of digital networked media). Efforts to transform state broadcasters into public broadcasters were undertaken with little or no public debate and there is still a lack of consensus on founding principles and core values. Efforts to define core values have been quite modest, largely confined to

media experts and a few concerned professionals. In these societies, priority values are based on traditional, conservative views that focus on nation-building, ethnic self-awareness and religious exclusivity – each of which has more often led to conflict than consensus. Public media are seen as political instruments to serve these goals rather than civil society. Local actors have typically been unable to discuss the issues and possible solutions for crucial questions, such as the kinds of media needed, their roles in society, or how to establish a public orientation in media policies (Marko 2017c).

On a normative level, stakeholders included in decision-making tend to advocate principles of pluralism, diversity, press freedom, open access to information and competition – i.e., values premised on Western democratic ideals. But democracy is not a static entity and requires continual discussion, dialogue and exchange. In practice, these values haven't been widely discussed and are largely 'paper tigers'. In BiH and Kosovo, the PSB concept was imposed by the international community, and there is little clarity in any WB country about which values are essential and which are not.

As a result, current PSB operations in the region do not fulfil their stipulated remits or perform their mandated roles in being public institutions working for the public. They do not primarily serve the public interest, but are the object of strict political control and instrumentalisation. This calamity has become increasingly visible with the growth of networked communications that are characterised by online discourse and facilitated by sources that offer domestic public and commercial media and enjoy much higher credibility and reliability among citizens (Eurobarometer 2014, 2015).

Problems in three levels of public service broadcasting operation

The absence of public discussion and failure to achieve consensus is reflected in three levels of PSB operation in WB countries: structure, digitalisation and interaction with audiences.

Structure: A dominant traditional paradigm

Structural transformation reveals the absence of Western PSB normative values. Public broadcasters in the WB region are organised within traditional structures that are massive and rigid as a heritage of the socialist system. Most have too many hierarchical layers of management, an aspect that complicates decision-making, and too many employees, which raises costs (numbers range between 800-900 in Kosovo and Bosnia, to 3,800 in Serbia). These broadcasters face significant challenges rooted in path dependencies because they were created with the logic of mass production, silo organisations and budgets, and strict hierarchical divisions in decision making. The inherited values reflect the state media paradigm. This has begun to change, but only modestly. In Croatia, public broadcasters adopted an ambitious plan to adapt

internal structure to a new media logic and rationalise production costs. In Serbia, a few actors – mostly experts in media and law – advocate for a functional-institutional paradigm instead of the purely institutional framework that has dominated media policies (Marko 2017b). But the efforts are so far modest, and results remain to be seen.

Digitalisation: Production, distribution, sharing

The delay of digitalisation creates a dire context for PSM production, distribution and interaction with audiences. In this region, production is highly decentralised, loosely co-ordinated, and without integrated newsrooms. So far, only Croatia's HRT is strategically focused on internal restructuring to create integrated newsrooms. RTV in Serbia adopted HRT's strategy in principle, but hasn't been able to implement it due to a lack of resources. In all the WB countries, PSB compares badly with private TV outlets, such as N1 and Al Jazeera Balkans, that were established from scratch and use digital production technologies and professional managers and employees who produce diverse programmes of good quality that are distinctive in comparison with commercial offers.

Promotion of pluralism and diversity in the public sphere was a primary expectation for the transformation to PSB. The democratising role of media is supposed to facilitate discourse in civil society and providing a forum for communities and individuals to express and contest ideas, and benefit from the interaction. But public broadcasters in the region have generally failed to perform this role due to lack of public trust and diverse programmes. While some sources (e.g., IREX MSI) think establishing the dual system of public and private media that is characteristic of Western Europe will contribute to the plurality of sources, this mainly affects external pluralism rather than internal – meaning more diversity *between* than *within*, which is a problem for PSB as such. There is a growing tendency in the WB to favour incumbent political actors that serve the government's purpose mainly. The rare exception of high internal pluralism is the second channel of RTV in Serbia, which broadcasts programmes for national minorities in nine languages (Marko 2013; Marko 2017a). But everywhere PSB popularity has dramatically decreased in competition with the private sector. The main reasons for any continuing popularity is not related to content quality, distinctiveness or exclusivity, but rather the opposite – the growing commercialisation of PSB.

Online presence and reach, as well as distribution strategies, vary significantly across WB countries. Most PSB organisations are not strategically oriented to develop online services. Only Serbia's RTS and Croatia's HRT have developed web pages with noteworthy reach and popularity. Significant development is beginning in RTK Kosovo and RTRS in BiH. RTKlive.com is retaining online audiences, in particular the diaspora audience that account for more than 60 per cent of the users (Miftari 2017). But everywhere, web pages are generally designed to support news that is produced primarily for broadcast channels. The only specialised platform is operated by HRTi Croatia, and Macedonia's MRT Play. HRTi is fairly popular and works smoothly. It is

user friendly and offers all types of content, including culture, documentaries, programmes for youth adults and children, programmes on religion, music, and news.

People: From comrades, through citizens, towards consumers

To serve as a forum for all citizens, public media needs to be popular and reach as much of a total population as possible. They must be trusted in order to achieve that. PSB organisations in the WB are fairly popular as broadcast sources of information with significant viewership, ranging from 20-22 per cent (Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro), up to 29 per cent in Croatia. The umbrella broadcaster in BiH never developed wide public support due the nation's divided nature (its rating in 2016 was around 5 per cent). The popularity of PSB in Macedonia and Albania is abysmal (Bino & Kadia 2017).

Table 4. Public service broadcasting vs. private television in Western Balkan countries (shares)

	PSB share (year)	Main commercial competitor share
Albania	No information	No information
Bosnia and Herzegovina	PSB total: 24 % (2016) FTV: 12 % RTRS: 7 % BHT: 5 %	OBN: 12 % Pink: 10 % Program plus: 9 % Hayat: 6 %
Croatia	HTV: 29 % (2015) – all 4 channels	Nova TV: 24 % (2015) RTL: 15 %
Kosovo	RTK: 22 % (2014)	KTV: 24 % (2014) RTV: 21-22 % (2014)
Macedonia	MTV 1: 7 % (2013) MTV 1 and 2: 6 % (2014)	Sitel: 29 % Kanal 5: 13 % Alsat M: 5 %
Montenegro	RTVCG1: 22 % (2013)	TV Pink: 27 % TV Vijesti: 20 % (2013)
Serbia	RTS: 20-22 % (2016)	TV Pink: 24 % Happy: 12-14 % (reality shows)

But even where popular, these organisations are not among the most trusted institutions. According to the Eurobarometer (2014, 2015), populations in these countries tend to demonstrate low levels of trust in media. In all these countries, citizens have more trust in the internet and social media sources than in broadcasting. The greatest decline in trust has been recorded in Montenegro and Serbia (Eurobarometer 2015).

Approaching citizens as active participants is entirely absent. Only a few organisations have any mechanism for interacting with their publics. In most cases, citizens rarely have opportunity to engage and there is scanty evidence they are willing anyway.¹

In several cases (Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia) various institutions, civil society groups and professional associations are entitled to nominate candidates to managing or consultative bodies, but the final decision on the nominees is made by political representatives in a process that is not transparent.

Out of ten broadcasters, only three (Croatia, Albania and Montenegro) have established an ‘ombudsman’ function. Croatia established such a body in 2011. In Albania, the aim of the Council for Viewers and Listeners is to hold RTSH accountable to the public and it presents an annual report to the Steering Council, AMA (Autoriteti Mediave Audiovizive), the Ministry for Media and the Parliamentary Commission for Education and Means of Public Communication (Bino & Kadia 2017). In Kosovo, although envisioned by law, such a body was never set up by the RTK Board. In Macedonia, this role has been played by MRT’s Programme Council. Except in Croatia, none of these bodies are efficient (Marko 2017b).

Lessons learned: Towards a functional paradigm

Taking into account both achievements and shortcomings in the difficult transition from state broadcasting towards public service media organisations, the ‘network society’ paradigm is not yet valid in WB societies. The region is stuck in broadcasting and rooted in an increasingly obsolete traditional mass media orientation that fails to cope with the rapidly changing media environment. These organisations are not considered the most reliable sources of information and they aren’t, in an apparent way, contributing to growth in democracy. There are several possible explanations:

- Achieving PSM is not on the agenda due to a political situation that is not conducive for the networked society paradigm to flourish. Societies that lean towards illiberal democracies with regimes that seek control of all public resources, especially the media, do not consider these potential developments as opportunities. On the contrary, they are generally hostile to the deliberative potential of networked communications.
- Moreover, the constitutive values of a genuine public service orientation haven’t been properly considered or discussed.
- In the domain of PSB reform, the approach has been strictly normative and neglects the contextual nature of change, thus failing to account for specific historic legacies and heritage systems.
- The normative approach looks good on paper but is an ‘empty shell’ in practice, incapable of fulfilling their remits (Jakubowicz 1995, 2004). Discussions about the roles of PSB in changing societies, which would encourage a shift to focusing on an institutional-functional paradigm, are neglected.

- Western Balkan countries, including their public broadcasters, too often lack either the necessary resources or knowledge (or both) to accomplish anything via digitalisation beyond traditional broadcasting.
- Public broadcasters here are detached from global trends and from their audiences, as evident in the decreasing popularity of programmes, general lack of trust, and only modest reach in what has been attempted online.

In the early 1990s, all of these broadcasting organisations inherited significant infrastructural resources and respected production cultures. Few have benefitted from either. Without a conducive culture, simply having institutions provides an insufficient basis for successful development. As observed by Darendorf (1990), it is important to build on the basis of a 'societal foundation' because that is essential for defending newly formed (or transformed) institutions. The WB region lacks a foundation for defending, much less advancing, PSB. Milton (2000) suggests that transforming institutions from a previous system, which is certainly the case with former state-controlled broadcasters, is much more complex and with more uncertain outcomes compared with establishing a new institution from scratch because inherited institutions were integral to a previous system that remains (in heavier or lighter degrees) with characteristics that are hard to 'erase'.

Moreover, lagging technological development and belated digitalisation in most WB countries means PSB has little impact or opportunity. This failure represents an existential threat to the future of PSM as such in this region. The transformation that has been achieved is largely confined to Croatia and Serbia. Croatia's government provided substantial support for building a transition network that will facilitate the distribution of digital signals, and HRT strategically embraced the opportunity to improve its production capacities. The process is still ongoing and considered by many to be too slow. In other WB countries, state support for building a transmission network for digital signals has been completely absent due to lack of funds and political obstruction, especially evident in BiH. Most states don't consider such a network to be a valuable resource, or care about guaranteeing an independent public company to provide equal opportunities for all.

Finally, economic instability and broken funding models explain why public institutions can be rather easily colonised and instrumentalised by political actors. This is a consequence of illiberal tendencies and the politicisation of the media landscape in general. Political elites control and use public media as an instrument of power in pursuing their own interests rather than to serve the public interest. Regulation and legal protection for media independence have been ineffective in the face of populist and increasingly authoritarian elites who adjust laws to minimise media as independent democratic actors (Marko 2016).

Conclusions

The inability of public sector broadcasters in the WB region to cope with challenges and embrace opportunities inherent to the network society paradigm is a significant problem given growth in online communication and digital communication technology. It is significant because this is co-related with changing habits and needs also among WB populations, especially the youth. These trends have not even been properly discussed in policies related to public broadcasters. In combination with the three determining contextual factors (socialist legacy, inadequate technical infrastructure, and economic disadvantages resulting in clientelism), for the most part WB public broadcasters are not trusted or distinctive and hardly contribute to democratic development.

Public broadcasters have generally failed to deeply enough consider their role and position as truly distinctive, or to pursue the excellence they could provide. This is an existential problem because most are quickly losing a race with commercial TV stations that are championing digital production and distribution. These companies started from scratch with purpose-built structures and are developing integrated newsrooms and collaborative cultures based on values that prize participation, production excellence, efficiency, and innovation. Compared with PSB, commercial media such as Al Jazeera Balkans or N1 are garnering more attention and generating much higher trust.

Developing public service media in the Western Balkans is especially important since trust in public institutions and media as a whole is eroding. These public broadcasters need to become respected facilitators in building the communications infrastructure needed for developing networked societies, both online and offline. For media policy, this implies the need to establish a firm public service orientation in the new media environment. As a precondition, the main actors, and not only political decision-makers, should discuss what constitutes the basis for such an orientation in this context, and the guiding values for this in practice. This should be undertaken as a series of domestic initiatives, not as another external push as has hitherto been the case.

Second, public service media providers should critically consider their role within Western Balkan societies. Their mere existence cannot be the penultimate purpose. Their validity as *public* media depends fundamentally on offering valuable and measurable contributions as decided by their host societies. This will require building a new management culture so that PSM can take a leadership role in developing media innovations in service-related operations, and adhere to the highest standards of ethical values in production and distribution. Secondly, public media must become the image and reality of a primary source for reliable information. Finally, these organisations need to experiment with audience interaction because their future depends on mastering this.

Notes

1. Two exceptions are Macedonia, where citizens protested (2016) for more freedoms and PSB was liberalised from political interference, and the Serbian province of Vojvodina, where dismissed journalists, civil activists and citizens organised an informal group (#PodrziRTV) to demonstrate against politically motivated removals in RTV.

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Public Service Media and Multilevel Governance

Citizen Participation in the Networked Society – the Spanish Case

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Abstract

The question about the future of public service media in the ‘networked society’ is directly related to the modernisation of European democracies and the role of citizen participation. In the context of a severe economic crisis, declining trust in public institutions and eroding citizen confidence in democratic structures, multilevel governance is an EU initiative for modernising democratic practices. Among the core principles are: co-operation, prioritising network structures, decentralisation, complementarity between public and private sectors, and facilitating civic participation. This chapter exposes the connection between the historic mission of public service broadcasting (collected in five areas or ‘blocks’), the contemporary obligations of public service media in a ‘networked society’, and the objectives of multilevel governance.

Keywords: European Union, media governance, public service broadcasting, media roles and functions, RTVE, Spain’s regions

Introduction¹

In December 2015, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) published a roadmap for the future of public service media (PSM), titled *Vision 2020: Connect, Grow and Influence*.² In the introduction, the EBU Director General at that time, Ms Ingrid Deltenre, emphasised the unique importance of PSM in European societies and acknowledged significant challenges. Her affirmation of PSM’s importance is the subject of heated debate in many circles, especially scholarly, political, and professional, and increasingly challenged across Europe.

Recent years have given rise to intense debate about the need for and role of PSM in the emerging context of a networked society in which media of communications are prolific and increasingly global. In this debate, defenders (e.g. Trambley 2016) and detractors (e.g. Carpentier 2015) alike assume media convergence is changing the nature of media and their uses. New modes of consumption rely on multiple platforms and interconnected devices and fuel expansive growth in online contents and services, much of which is generated by users themselves. This context poses

Muñoz Saldaña, Mercedes & Azurmendi Adarraga, Ana (2018). Public Service Media and Multilevel Governance. Citizen Participation in the Networked Society – the Spanish Case in Gregory Ferrell Lowe, Hilde Van den Bulck, Karen Donders (eds.) *Public Service Media in the Networked Society*. Göteborg: Nordicom.

difficult adaptation challenges for PSM organisations (SWD 2016), for the most part heritage public service broadcasting (PSB) organisations. The essential question hinges on whether a public sector in media, and in particular a dedicated public service institution, is necessary in European democracies under contemporary conditions, often described as a networked society context, that is radically different compared with characteristic conditions at the time when PSB was created in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Adequately addressing this question requires situating consideration in the context of a general economic crisis and a particular political collapse in several European governments and declining trust in public institutions more or less everywhere since 2008 (Mate 2015). Loss of legitimacy and eroding citizen confidence in democratic structures³, which persist (FBBVA 2016), threaten the stability of social systems and make urgent the need for deep reflection on how to improve the governance of public institutions and services (Oxford 2017). That is the focal interest of our chapter.

Many EU institutions were affected by the past decade of economic and growing political crisis, as evident in dozens of reports and studies that offer proposals for improving and modernising democratic practice as efforts to reverse waning legitimacy. One that was released on 3 April 2014 is particularly important for our work in this chapter – the Charter for Multilevel Governance in Europe (CMLG). This is a political manifesto for cities and regions across Europe that encourages public authorities to make multilevel governance a reality in the day-to-day preparation and application of relevant policies today. In practice, this requires collaboration between different levels of government (local, regional, national and European) and the application of principles to enable efficient policy-making. The key principles include co-operation, prioritising network structures, decentralisation, complementarity between public and private sectors, and facilitating civic participation. Each and all of which are considered essential for guaranteeing the success of public policies that are enacted in the best and truest interests of citizens in a democracy.

Although not defined in detail in the charter, multilevel governance is treated from a political perspective as “co-ordinated institutional action by the European Union, the Member States and local and regional authorities, based on partnership and aimed at drawing up and implementing EU policies”.⁴ The background is a white paper on multilevel governance that was signed in 2009, which launched a consultation process aimed at developing a common, understanding of European governance based on shared EU values. The work has been handled by the Committee of the Regions of the European Union (CDR), which has been actively developing a method to supervise the application of multilevel governance that hinges on a set of indicators based on best practices in this area of policy work. The project has been undertaken in co-operation with the European Commission.

With this background in mind, the objectives of the 2014 charter respond to four areas of general concern: 1) fostering a “European mindset” in each region or city by co-operating with political and administrative bodies spanning the local to

the European level; 2) promoting cross-border collaboration with other regions and cities, thereby overcoming administrative obstacles and geographic boundaries; 3) modernising administration by taking full advantage of digital infrastructure and innovative solutions to increase transparency and aperture (i.e. scope of availability) and offering quality public services that are easily accessible to citizens; and 4) encouraging the participation of citizens and civil society organisations in policy decision-making processes, thereby developing participatory democracy and promoting active citizenship.

Although the CMLG lacks legal enforceability, the signatories commit to using the proposed framework for managing public policy, for launching projects in association with public and private sectors, for developing territorial co-operation and for modernising administration entities. This initiative is seen as a vital tool for accomplishing a necessary democratic regeneration of European societies – indeed, of the EU as such. The Charter on Multilevel Governance stipulates the necessity for two essential reasons: “[I]t has become clear that the traditional models of governance no longer match the complex reality of today’s society, and political credibility and legitimacy everywhere are in a deep crisis”; and “institutions and systems that prove unable to adapt to changes in society make themselves redundant”⁵. In short, the old ways of doing things isn’t working and what doesn’t work will be ended. The potential collapse of the public sector in government and more generally is, obviously, of existential concern.

Various policy areas are addressed in the CMLG, one of which directly challenges media systems in a networked society. The challenge is to foster more widespread and persistently active citizen participation in civil society and public affairs through the facilitation of participatory democracy. Success depends on citizen involvement that depend on media structures to enable citizens to self-organise and channel their own demands, reactions, criticisms and proposals. It is understood that democratic maturity depends on the capacity of citizens to participate in public debates, affect their outcomes, and impact the execution of public affairs. Therefore, elected and appointed authorities are considered to be obligated to ensure there are sufficient spaces and resources for citizens to participate fully in the affairs of civil society at all levels. This is an ambitious undertaking that is important for EU development at the everyday level of citizen activity. Our interest is the degree to which achieving this ambition depends on the support and activities of media sectors and network structures.

The policy objectives focus on participation and social interaction in multilevel governance, which are vitally important but not yet achieved. Achievement needs to be prioritised because this is a prerequisite for a healthy democratic network society. Without wanting to reduce the complexity of the challenges involved only to media, it is clearly true that media must play an essential facilitative role. As Deltenre argued, although citizens have access to more services and content than ever before, the quality of political-public conversation has decreased while populism and extremism are increasingly feeding conversations and fuelling online discourse in web communities

(EBU 2015). If one agrees on the co-determinate importance of democratic health, active citizenship and the use of media (European Audiovisual Observatory 2017), then PSM clearly has a significant mission to improve participatory democracy within the complicated and complex conditions that characterise a networked society. That is our starting point for the research, the method for which is divided in two parts.

In the first part, we consider the historic mission attributed to PSM in five areas or 'blocks' and propose specific obligations for each that are adapted to the needs of a networked society. Taken together, these explain our ideas of what would be ideal in multilevel governance that fosters citizen participation. This part is necessarily abstract because we are dealing with theory and normative values. The second part is concrete and based in an empirical study. We consider the findings from a case study of the missions and obligations for participation in Spain's legislation on PSM as a reflection of multilevel governance. Our conclusions clarify the relationship between PSM's missions and the objective for higher participation in multilevel governance in Spain, and based on our findings, we propose improvements for PSM in Spain that should have wider applicability in the EU (at least).

Public service media's roles and obligations in a networked society

This chapter is about PSM's role and obligations in a networked society with regard to practices in multilevel governance. The focal point of this first part of our treatment hinges on the absolute importance of facilitating citizen participation in civic affairs and governance. Debate over the existence of, and appropriate configuration for, PSM is one of the most critical elements for consideration because all public entities, and especially public media, face powerful enemies (some old and some new) who pointedly question the need for public institutions and their services in a digitalised environment often characterised as an 'information society' – which is presumably nurtured by and dependent on competition.

Some studies celebrate hybrid models as potential solutions for contemporary problems related to PSM in this area of interest (Bennett & Medrado 2013), while others doubt PSM is even needed in a world that prioritises consumption which is, by definition, highly personalised and often removed from public interest objectives (Nightingale & Dwyer 2006). Some advocate abandoning the concept of 'public service' as such to instead elevate 'community services' that are presumably more conducive to citizen participation in regional and local environments (Carpentier 2015). Thus, there are different prescriptions for how to best achieve multilevel governance and the appropriate media structure needed for this. But among critics and supporters alike, PSM is a focal point in this debate.

PSM organisations have responded in ways that indicate an understandable desire to survive in the emerging context of a networked society. Most are guided

by mandated obligations to innovate. PSM therefore insists on a right to overcome hindrances and obstacles, and calls for regulatory reforms to enable their efforts to provide the public with value that is both deserved and necessary to ensure the legitimacy of the enterprise (Debrett 2015). Most defenders (e.g. De Moragas & Prado 2013) defend PSM's continuation by referring to its historic mission that is based on the market's inability to serve and satisfy all political, social and cultural functions adequately (i.e. market failure in media). What applied to PSB continues to matter for modern democracies, and is especially needed today given the lack of correspondence between spaces defined by the audio-visual market and different types of communities, because unequal opportunities to access services and cultural goods result from 'divides' that are caused by continuous technological innovation that does not diffuse evenly (Berg et al. 2014).

Others don't disagree, but emphasise renewal (e.g. Hendy 2013; Trambly 2016). Here, the focus is on commitment to securing an innovative future for PSM in the digital era of networked media systems. For many observers, the focus is less and less on defending historic structures and systems, and increasingly on future-oriented development. The first conclusions in a comparative study undertaken in 2014 on the situation in Canada, France and the United Kingdom⁶ provide a good example of why this is generally considered necessary. The study concludes that the future of PSM hinges on citizens recovering a firm sense of its legitimacy and conviction of its usefulness in contemporary society. This perspective emphasises the importance of digital 'common goods' for addressing the challenge of cultivating a digital public sphere for the practice of democracy, a 'place' that is open to everyone for participation in creativity, conversation and debate (cf. Murdock 2005).

These reflections indicate the central point of debate about the permanence (or not) of PSM in the future, and the preferred operational mode for this – if able to continue in some form, at least. The point of debate is based on how one understands what are and are not persistent public service obligations for media in serving a democracy. This basis has continued through decades of continual change in PSB (the forerunner to PSM). What is needed today, as before, are mainly decisions about the most appropriate way to satisfy public service obligations in each period. We certainly cannot resolve such a complex task here, and actually that is never finally possible due to its very complexity and also variability in different societies. It is relevant, however, to our investigation which elaborates five dimensions of the historic PSB mission with specific obligations that continue to matter in today's increasingly networked societies – i.e. for PSM. This implies our belief that the historic mission continues to be fundamentally relevant and doesn't change in a networked society (see Muñoz Saldaña 2015). We argue the case for specific operational obligations that arise due to unique needs in a networked society.⁷ For each of the five dimensions we connect the historic mission and contemporary obligations with multilevel governance.

1. Be a shared reference point for all citizens offering a universal service⁸

This aspect of the historic PSB mission is as relevant today as ever. There are specific obligations today that relate to the unique needs of a networked society. Among the most important of these are guaranteeing that citizens can access PSM, unimpeded, through the varied providers that comprise the network. This obligation is not exclusive to PSM and involves political, legal, business and professional spheres. This is difficult because PSM organisations can't guarantee this alone. This need points to the importance of understanding PSM as an interdependent node in a network.

Second, PSM must ensure the provision of varied content on diverse platforms and have the necessary resources to accomplish this. This is still important in the networked society context because domestic contents and services are less representative in most countries than international material.

Third, PSM must adapt to new modes of media consumption, and prioritise interactive services and on-demand content. That is a long-term objective these organisations have been investing to accommodate for many years in the transition from PSB to PSM (Lowe & Bardoel 2007). The problem, again, is in the degrees to which PSM organisations are mandated or constrained from doing this, and resourced to accomplish it.

Fourth, PSM must promote active forms of communication, not merely passive consumption of media, and especially work to integrate young people who want to participate with their own content by establishing new participative formats and platforms. This is an essential point and new challenge for traditional PSB organisations.

Thus, multilevel governance aims to increase the level and the effectiveness of citizen participation in public affairs. This requires guaranteeing universal service because this is a prerequisite to accomplishing the goal. It is vital to ensure the broadest possible access for a population as a whole and in its several groupings. It is also essential that PSM provide the needed quantity and quality of information and content, remembering the problem with market failure especially, and facilitate the expression of individual opinions as well as collective discourse that shapes public opinion. Ultimately, then, policy must guarantee all citizens a right to equitable participation in public life (2001/C 320/04, points 6 and 7; 2009/C 257/01, points 9 and 10). As specified in the policy:

Assuming that “the definition of the public service mission must be as specific as possible”, then “a qualitative definition entrusting a given broadcaster with the obligation to provide a wide range of programming and a balanced and varied broadcasting offer” is necessary⁹. This reflects “the need for continual development and diversification of activities in the digital media environment for audio-visual services on all distribution platforms”¹⁰ “to the extent that they contribute to pluralism, enrich cultural and political debate and widen the choice of programmes”.¹¹

2. Facilitate social cohesion for individual, group and community integration

The importance of social cohesion has long been recognised by every society and, in Europe especially, it has been generally agreed that public service media are especially obligated to do everything possible to support and secure this. In the context of a networked society, PSM has specific obligations that include, first, contributing to successfully overcoming the digital divide among populations and advancing the accomplishment of digital literacy¹² by providing tools, contents and services that are broadly available and widely distributed. Availability and use of such resources are especially important for education systems and in programmes serving adults, young people and children alike. Second, it is vital for PSM to guarantee easy access to programmes and services on new platforms, especially, because these are the leading edge of sociotechnical development in networked societies.

Thus, multilevel governance requires a strong, clear commitment from PSM organisations to support multilevel integration, not least since this is vital for social cohesion. The mission must be oriented towards encouraging the sense of belonging among citizens in their diverse communities. Media literacy is an instrumental factor, which requires easy access to and use of networked media. Lacking this, integration is impossible. Feeling connected with public affairs should be reflected in content and programming, and welcoming participation is an essential requirement for PSM at local, regional, national and international levels.

3. Constitute a source of impartial and independent information capable of providing innovative content at high standards of quality and ethical practice

It has long been understood that PSB is supposed to serve a ‘benchmarking’ function in national media systems. In the networked society, several specific obligations are entailed in this. First, PSM must strive to remain a point of reference with credibility and trust among the citizenry at large. Second, PSM needs to be a nexus for pluralistic feelings and diverse ideologies that are necessary to enhance shared understanding and reduce unhealthy fragmentation. This obligation favours participation in civil society as a developmental function. Third, PSM must be a ‘role model’ in the wider network in compliance with legislation and high standards in voluntary ethical codes of professional practice on all platforms, across media, services and contents.

Thus, multilevel governance addresses the difficulty that citizens have in participating effectively given the quantity of resources and contents available and, on many occasions, the lack of quality in these (rigour, professionalism and honesty) in treating matters of shared general interest. PSM must be mandated and presented to citizens as a source of reliable content and services that are governed by high standards of quality in a systemic way. Citizens must actively participate (through appropriate systems) in (all) processes of decision, creation and control of content and services offered.

4. Be a forum for pluralistic public discussion that promotes civil participation

PSB has long been expected to both respect and represent pluralism in societies and to actively promote citizen participation in public affairs. Specific obligations in networked society include facilitating debate by featuring issues and perspectives from diverse groups, and encouraging democratic participation – not only in elections but also in decision making processes and debates on matters of societal importance. These are the first two aspects here.

Third, PSM is obligated to advocate and advance democratic values. It has a vital role in the work necessary to inculcate values. Fourth, PSM must be a persistent promoter of democratic participation in all facets, harnessing the resources of a networked society in ways that are adapted to diverse publics. Fifth, PSM has a continuing obligation to promote a culture of tolerance and understanding.

Sixth, PSM has a continuing obligation of ‘holding governments and European institutions accountable’, advocating for transparency and contributing to the development of an open European public sphere, and remaining engaged in communication about these matters. Fulfilling this obligation requires a legal framework capable of guaranteeing the independence of PSM and a structure and system of oversight that is not contaminated by partisan political interests. Finally, PSM must promote dialogue through interactivity amongst citizens, institutions and social groups.

Multilevel governance therefore suggests a paradox rooted in the fact that citizens can feel disconnected from public affairs that concern them directly in the context of an increasingly connected society. Political disaffection has contributed to a worrisome disconnection. PSM must prioritise content and services that are of social importance, and encourage the active involvement and participation of citizens in these matters. PSM organisations and resources are the property of citizens. From this perspective, their management and control must be guided by a sensitivity to citizen interests.

5. Encourage audio-visual creation and production, and promote sharing cultural heritage in the digital sphere

PSB has long had a cultural mission, partly related to advancing the cause of enlightenment and partly to enhancing an appreciation for the richness of multicultural expression. In the networked society, PSM is obligated to promote original content production in new forms, and to reflect and support cultural diversity in music, art, theatre, cultural events and programmes (and all else). Moreover, PSM has a distinctive responsibility for digitalising archives due to their historic importance in domestic audio-visual heritage across Europe, and to make the archives accessible to the public that has paid for this. Third, PSM must promote intercultural dialogue, respecting the identity and values of each territory.

Thus, multilevel governance has divergent but connected responsibilities caused by the urgency of mitigating two risks in contemporary societies. One is the risk of homogenisation and uniformity caused by pressures that cultivate globalisation in culture, before which the diversity of states and regions (within them) must be respected and fostered. The other is the risk of inequality within and between EU member states, which must be met by both defending solidarity and respecting diversity.

These five dimensions are pertinent to digital communication in networked societies and suggest the continuing importance of public service obligations that are rooted in the historic mission. These measures will encourage citizen participation and democratic development through dialogue and interactivity; promote the creation and production of pluralistic content; encourage cultural exchange and social cohesion through public platforms that are open to everyone; and conserve and share a space with citizens who oversee and debate the role of governments and authorities, promote transparency, prioritise public matters, and have a key role in the governance and practice of public service media. With this schema as our framework, the Spanish case study explores the role of participation in legislation related to PSM and evaluates the degrees to which the objective of multilevel governance is adequately reflected.

Multilevel governance participation in Spain's public service media regulation

The reality of PSM provision in Spain is complex. There is the national *Corporación de Radio y Televisión Española* (RTVE) plus twelve regional public operators¹³ and a series of local services in each region. RTVE activity is regulated by three laws: Law 17/2006 on state owned radio and television; Law 8/2009 on corporation financing; and Law 7/2010 on general audio-visual communication. In addition to national legislation that also applies at the regional level, each regional operator has specific legislation at that level. Our study focused on the legal framework affecting RTVE because this is generally applicable and constitutes the basis for frames at the regional level.

To begin, we observe that none of the three national laws specifically refer to either governance or multilevel governance as an express objective for RTVE's public service mission. Perhaps the concept is too specific or too political. In fact, more general references to obligations earlier discussed are also missing, including: managing and developing democratic life; active citizenship with public and open debate about matters of public interest; and PSM's status as a public point of contact between citizens, governments and institutions. In this light, it is clear that Spanish legislation is premised on an approach to communication in a representative democracy that is essentially one-way or transmission-oriented, rather than a participatory democracy that is interactive. An update to the objectives and principles raised in this chapter is needed to advance the task of adapting the public service mission to social life in a networked society.

Despite not specifying a lot that is important, Spanish legislation makes several references to participation. Law 17/2006 specifies a function of public service entrusted to RTVE as “the promoting of pluralism, participation and other constitutional values, guaranteeing access to important social and political groups through providing a service of universal coverage, which is understood as the broadest coverage possible of the national territory” (section 2 d). Furthermore, it specifies that public entities have the obligation to “promote the right to access the media” (section 3), and stipulates an advisory board of 16 members appointed by different political and social institutions (section 23).

Law 8/2009 on the financing of RTVE adds an additional public service obligation of incorporating in its programmes “interactive services which give access to political, union and social groups” (section 9, chapter 5), and Law 7/2010 on general audio-visual communication acknowledges “the right to participation in the control of audio-visual content”. In this way, “any physical or legal person can request that the relevant audio-visual authority carries out a control on the appropriateness of the audio-visual content with the regulations in force or the codes of self-regulation”. And, for their part, “the authority, if they consider it fitting, will dictate recommendations for a better fulfilment of the regulations in force” (section 9).

In affect then, participation in the legal framework for RTVE is confined, firstly, to audiences’ activities in demanding the fulfilment of content regulations (legislative and self-regulatory codes) and, secondly, to the historic exercise of a right to access public media. Thirdly, it is configured through an institutional body called the ‘advisory board’.

There are three implications. Firstly, participation that is geared towards demanding the fulfilment of regulations (laws and codes) is about involving people in ensuring the fulfilment of public service tasks that are entrusted to RTVE. To meet this objective, RTVE relies on an ombudsman as the “defender of the viewer, listener and user”. This representative receives complaints and suggestions, completes reports each trimester on the fulfilment of regulations, and has a monthly television programme responding to issues. However, the information available on the related website is obsolete (last updated in March 2009¹⁴) and the lack of awareness is evident in the low popularity of the programme and the low numbers of complaints and suggestions received.¹⁵ Despite the positive aspects of having an ombudsman, the role reflects the traditional concept of the citizen only as a receiver and user, not as an active participant that is involved with the provision of public service in the digital age.

Secondly, the right to access, recognised in section 20.3 of the Spanish Constitution as well, guarantees: “access to this media for important political and social groups, respecting the pluralism of society and the diverse languages of Spain.” The exercise of this right in the national, public corporation RTVE is specified as:

1. The right of all organisations and groups to attend and make themselves heard in news or content they are directly involved in, such as current affairs issues.

2. Recognition of the right for RTVE to ensure the presence and expression of political parties, trade unions and business organisations, religious faiths, consumer associations of broader interest (NGOs, charities, cultural organisations) and, in general, all types of political and social groups with legal status, in accordance with their goals and their importance in Spanish society.

It should be reiterated that the beneficiary of this right is not the individual citizen but instead important political and social groups. RTVE's online tool for satisfying the right to access includes a request form that should be sent to a specific address and specifies the existence of a participation and complaints monitoring system aimed at guaranteeing the effective exercise of this right. However, several voices have warned about the theoretical (Callejo 2007) and practical (Díaz Arias 2012) difficulty of exercising this right in Spain. As in the case of the ombudsman, despite the beneficial contribution of this right as a participation tool, in practice familiarity and effectiveness are very limited. In practice, the right to access is geared exclusively for complaints regarding errors in news or other programming on the part of social or political representative groups within society.

Third, participation via the advisory board is clearly insufficient as this body was not included in the most recent document about RTVE's organisational structure (Resolution: 22 December 2016).¹⁶ Although the law stipulates its configuration and competencies, in the digital platform no reference is made to the advisory board as a representative body, nor is there any link hinting its existence, competencies or specific actions. There is no way to investigate its composition or work dynamics. The last news published about the activity of the advisory board is dated 4 November 2015 and makes reference not to the board's own activities but to the presentation from the Director General of RTVE at that time to the board about RTVE's activities that year.¹⁷ In February 2016, the Board of Consumers and Users (CCU in Spanish)¹⁸ called for a revitalisation of the advisory board to RTVE and demanded that the legal responsibilities must be fulfilled.¹⁹

Thus, the advisory board as a tool for institutional participation by the user (Carpentier 2015) is currently at a standstill within the management and operations of RTVE. There are various reasons for this situation (historical factors, scant legal development, lack of interest on the part of social institutions, etc.), but negligible political interest to involve citizens with those governing public audio-visual services is especially noteworthy. Improvement of all these potential tools (the ombudsman, the right to access, and the advisory board) would serve to advance citizen participation in the development of PSM in Spain.

With all that said, it is clear however that the citizen participation objective of multilevel governance goes beyond what is even contemplated in Spain so far, both in connection with the historic public service mission and obligations for PSM in a networked society. Higher sophistication and maturing would require accommodating the user as more than a consumer, receiver or the target of broadcast communica-

tions. It would require accommodating the user as an active citizen in their role as the service owner with the decisive role in defining, creating and managing RTVE.

As earlier noted, if we agree on the co-determinate importance of democratic health, active citizenship and the use of media (European Audiovisual Observatory 2017), then PSM has a mission to improve participatory democracy under the complicated and complex conditions that characterise a networked society. As many scholars argue, one factor that influences the quality of democracy is ‘social capital’. An active civic society that is well informed, discusses public affairs, and routinely participates in the deliberation and deciding of public issues has a positive influence on democracy (Tusell 2015). Hence, the enhancement of the RTVE’s civic participation tools would improve the democratic health of Spain today.

Conclusions

We want to emphasise the key line of argumentation in this chapter, which is the pressing need to make progress in implementing good multilevel governance in efforts to renew twenty-first century democracies in Europe. Considering multilevel governance as a new and useful way to understand the role of government and the practice of managing public affairs is characterised by the collaboration of multiple stakeholders across levels from international to local, in public and private sectors, both collectively and as individuals. It inherently requires co-operation, developing network structures, decentralisation, complementarity between public and private sectors, and civic participation – as stipulated at the start of the chapter.

The link between multilevel governance as the key participation objective and PSM’s historic mission and contemporary networked obligations can be summarised as:

- Guaranteeing all citizens an equal opportunity to participate in public life through the provision of a universal service.
- Encouraging the sense of belonging that is essential for any community to connect citizens with matters of public interest at all levels (local, regional and national, especially).
- Providing content and services that fully comply with the law and adhere to high standards in professional codes. This now involves welcoming citizen participation in all phases of governance over contents and services.
- Respecting cultural diversity and protecting the distinctive cultures of within each state and its regions, and prioritising citizen participation in PSM through investment in original, diverse contents for each state and region.

In terms of evaluating Spanish legislation on RTVE, we recommend two things. First, we recommend introducing specific objectives pertaining to multilevel governance in RTVE’s mandate that include citizen participation for the development of democratic

life; the exercise of active citizenship, with public and open debate on matters of public interest; and point to the public contact between citizens, governments and institutions.

Second, as regards the three traditional tools in the legal framework (the ombudsman, the right to access, and the advisory board), it is vital to implement participation that considers the user as an active citizen who owns the service in all dimensions and processes. Offering citizens the possibility of active involvement (not merely to balance or repair potential irregularities) in the processes of deciding directions, management, supervision and creation of content – should facilitate participation in all of that. This objective is a priority and its realisation would be a sign of inarguable legitimacy for RTVE in the development of public service media as multi-platform content and services in Spain.

Notes

1. This chapter is based on work done in the R&D&I Research Project (2013-2016): “Transformation of regional television in Spain: the weakening of public service and the technological development outlook in a crisis context” (Ref. CS02013-42270-R).
2. <https://www.ebu.ch/publications/vision-2020-connect-grow-influence> (consulted on 7 June 2017)
3. For example, Metroscopia’s ‘barometer of institutional trust’ in 2015 showed that only 38 per cent of those surveyed approved of the work done by the Spanish Parliament, and only 21 per cent of Spaniards positively valued the political parties. This data was similar to findings in other countries: France had 37 per cent and 9 per cent approval ratings respectively (CEVIPOF-Opinion-way 2015); Italy had 10 per cent and 15 per cent (EURISPES report 2015); and the United States had an 8 per cent rate of trust in Congress (Gallup 2015).
4. This consideration is supported on the principle of subsidiarity which prevents political decisions and actions from being concentrated at a single level of power and supports their adoption at the most appropriate level in relation to the objective sought. Considering that “regional and local entities are responsible for the application of 70 per cent of all EU legislation”, they perform a fundamental role in the future of European democracy on all dimensions.
5. Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on ‘New Forms of Governance: Europe, a framework for citizens’ initiative’, DOC 144, 15.5.2001, p. 1.
6. Project: “Renewal of public service media in the internet age in France, the UK, and Canada” funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) with research grant number 435-2014-1300.
7. In this regard, the following documents are of interest: The ruling of the Court of Justice on Danish public television, TV2 (2008); The European Parliament Report (2009-2014) on public service broadcasting in the digital age: the future of the dual system.
8. “This concept establishes the right of all people to access certain services considered essential and imposes on providers the obligation to present specific services in precise conditions, with complete territorial coverage and at a reasonable price” (COM 2004, 374 final: 8). The EU institutions have impact on both the flexibility and the evolutionary nature of a term that must be adapted to the circumstances of the sector it is applied to.
9. See, 2009/C 257/01, point 47.
10. See, 2009/C 257/01, point 47.
11. See, 2009/C 257/01, point 16.
12. The European Commission has defined this term as the “ability to access the media, to understand and critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media content and to create communications in a variety of contexts” (Recommendation 2009/625/EC).

13. Of the twelve, eleven are grouped in the FORTA Organisation (Federación de Organismos de Radio y Televisión Autonómicos). The following autonomous communities do not have regional public television: Navarra, Castilla León, Cantabria, La Rioja and Valencia. Extremadura's public television network is not a member of the FORTA.
14. <http://www.rtve.es/television/20090326/cual-papel-defensora-del-espectador/254209.shtml> (consulted on 5 June 2017)
15. <http://www.rtve.es/television/20090326/cual-papel-defensora-del-espectador/254209.shtml> (consulted on 5 June 2017)
16. <http://teledetodos.es/index.php/noticias/item/1292-usuarios-piden-que-el-consejo-asesor-de-rtve-se-implique-en-la-programacion> (consulted on 1 June 2017)
17. <http://www.rtve.es/rtve/20151104/reunion-del-consejo-asesor-rtve/1247780.shtml> (consulted on 1 June 2017)
18. The Board of Consumers and Users is a body planned in the sixth part of section 22 of the General Law for the Defence of Consumers and Users. It is set out as a representative and consultative body on a national scale through the most representative consumer organisations to defend the interests of consumers and users and to indicate the decisions that are made by public powers regarding consumer policy.
19. <http://teledetodos.es/index.php/noticias/item/1292-usuarios-piden-que-el-consejo-asesor-de-rtve-se-implique-en-la-programacion> (consulted on 1 June 2017)

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Public Service Media and Digital Innovation

The Small Nation Experience

Ruth McElroy & Caitriona Noonan

Abstract

This chapter identifies asymmetries of power in the network society and analyses the place of public service media therein. In doing so, we draw upon two bodies of literature – theoretical considerations of small nations, and minority-language media studies – which rarely inform international debates about the digital horizons of public service media. Through critical discussion of some of the digital myths that circulate in industry and academic discourse, we argue for greater attention to how the inequalities of global power that characterise the network society are negotiated. Using empirical research on and with TG4, the Irish language broadcaster and S4C, the Welsh language broadcaster, we demonstrate how digital platforms can, and already do, help achieve objectives that are core to public service broadcasting's public purpose. However, significant structural issues remain which require careful intervention from policy-makers to ensure linguistic vibrancy and media plurality.

Keywords: digital media discourse, minority language, social media, media policy, broadcasting, Wales

Introduction

This chapter enriches our understanding of how a network society might operate in the context of public service media (PSM) in small nations, especially regarding the very specific content of minority-language broadcasters. We identify key differentials of power and opportunity that govern how new digital affordances operate. We argue against a pervasive tendency towards futurology and technophilia in dominant strands of discourse on the network society now circulating in media industries and among media policy makers. This over-concentration on technology fetishizes the object of scientific innovation and obscures the social world in which technologies are brought to life by users and viewers. Often this is a result of approaching digital innovation as a narrow economic and technical objective. Government policies that promote a digital economy are especially susceptible. 'Digital discourse' is frequently associated with democratic ideals of universality, inclusion and plurality, which are core values

for PSM, but our research in selected small nations reveals the more complex and multidimensional ways in which power is exercised.

We begin by outlining the conceptual value of small nations and minority-language media studies which ground our analysis. We proceed with an overview of broader theoretical models from which we draw – including Castells’ influential thesis on the network society. We then identify popular myths that abound in discourse on digital innovation and argue the need for critical interrogation. After clarifying the methods used for our research, we present original empirical findings that identify emerging digital innovations currently being implemented by PSM organisations in Ireland and Wales. This contribution to the RIPE@2017 Reader reveals how minority-language media are simultaneously negotiating asymmetries of power in the network society context and seizing opportunities offered by the global, highly personalised relationships that are characteristic of the network society.

Critical approaches to small nations and minority-language media

Along with colleagues in the Centre for Media and Culture in Small Nations, we use the concept of small nations to understand questions of power, scale and sustainability in the creative output of the audio-visual sector. This perspective balances concern with general tendencies in PSM and the globalisation of audio-visual production on the one hand, and on the other the particularity of cultural and political contexts of small nations. It is impossible to undertake work on small nations without putting power – cultural, national, and global – at the forefront of consideration. Moreover, to speak a minority-language is, to some degree, always to have power on one’s mind and on one’s tongue. The frame of small nations is a highly productive way of tracing how power operates in the emerging network society environment.

Nations may be small due to the relative size of several variables including geography, population, Gross National Product and internal market, or their relative political impact. Small nations may not be self-explanatory, but they are numerous. Mark Bray and Steve Packer note that over “half the sovereign states have populations below five million, and 54 have populations below 1.5 million”; hence, they argue, “the world is a world of small states” (cited in Hjort & Petrie 2007: 4). Globalisation has caused small nations to adopt diverse strategies to negotiate their places within today’s highly interconnected media and communication systems. Scale shapes strategies.

The analytic value of ‘small nations’ stems from its relational focus, not only in terms of size but, importantly, also in the relative power of small versus large nations. The role of PSM in small nations may be especially pronounced and is often crucial to the sustainability of a vibrant, pluralistic television system. A limited domestic market in audiences, advertising and licence fee income, coupled with competition from imported content and barriers to export, create a specific set of challenges that PSM faces in small

nations (Iosifidis 2007; Lowe & Nissen 2011; Moring 2013; McElroy 2016; McElroy & Noonan 2016). These PSM organisations must negotiate competing demands in a context where the issue of scale and the specifics of their remits are intertwined.

This is most evident in the specific case of minority-language public service broadcasters. The World Indigenous Television Broadcasters Network (WITBN), a “global alliance which aims to unify television broadcasters worldwide to retain and grow our Indigenous languages and cultures”, lists 14 members which include Maori Television in New Zealand, NRK Sápmi in Norway and YLE Sápmi in Finland, Ōiwi Television in Hawaii, S4C in Wales, and TG4 in Ireland. Often very small-scale even in the context of the broadcast organisations in small nations, minority-language PSBs are expected to sustain linguistic vitality and cultural diversity while also needing to retain political support for public funding, to maintain viewing figures, support indigenous production, and compete in international markets. Further complicating matters, minority-language broadcasters frequently exist in markets dominated by a powerful majority language company, as in Ireland, the UK and Spain.

The media are an important cultural forum through which identity is expressed. As Elin Gruffydd Jones argues, “television enables a language community to speak to itself [...]. [I]t can build and strengthen that community’s sense of collective identity” (2007: 190). At both national and supranational levels, several policy measures have been established to support minority-language media provision, including publicly-funded media (Cormack & Hourigan 2007). Impact on the acquisition or actual use of the minority language remains contested, however (Dunbar 2012). As noted, in both policy and practice minority-language broadcasters face unique challenges. For example, reflecting on the remit of BBC Alba, the Scottish Gaelic language channel, Dunbar (2012: 392) outlined the considerable demands they must meet: “Where a minority language community is fortunate enough even to have one station, that station must serve the needs of the entire community, something which is expected of few majority language broadcasters, even state supported broadcasters such as the BBC which has a range of services.”

In researching minority-language PSM organisations, it became necessary for us to hold together literature on both the wider contexts of the small-nations where TG4 and S4C operate (Ireland and Wales), and the specific remit and cultural role they play for Irish-language and Welsh-language speakers in those nations respectively. While scale is integral to the literature on small nations, language per se is less centrally a focus. In contrast, minority-language media studies are valuable in their dual concern with identifying the potential of mediated communications to maintain and normalise minority-language usage, while also recognising that media systems are a route by which dominant languages and worldviews travel and assert their power (see Cormack & Hourigan 2007). Writing about ethnic and indigenous people in Latin America, Uribe-Jongbloed (2013) argues that demand for their own media spaces arises from a need to express their own perspectives to one another and to society at large. In doing so, they seek to challenge the misrepresentation of their “whole culture

and world view [which] remain absent from the nation-state hegemonic discourse” (p.32). It is therefore vital in “the design and establishment of media outlets to modify negative collective images and one-sided representations which is fundamental if we are convinced that power in the network society is communication power” (p.33).

Often closely linked with activist interventions, this scholarship approaches media as *one* important element of the social ecology that shapes language use. That is pertinent to the focus of this book because networks are integral to language use, language shift, and linguistic identity. As Cunliffe et al. (2013: 339-340) observe, “offline social networks are recognized as an important site for the development of language practice and of language norms, particularly in opposition to the standard majority norms”. Therefore, minority-language media studies that take an engaged but critical approach to global communication technologies sharpen our critical analysis of digital innovation as experienced within small nations – the focus of this contribution.

Digital myths in the network society

In his landmark work on the networked society, Manuel Castells argues this phenomenon is “manifested in the transformation of sociability” that results from “networked individualism” which is “not a consequence of the Internet or new communication technologies, but a change that is fully supported by the logic embedded in the communication networks” (2005: 11-12). PSM around the world are faced with the challenge of finding new ways to serve their publics in the context of this transformation of sociability. There seems to be a major contradiction between rising individualism on the one hand and the aspiration of broadcasters to remain a public service for all on the other. While PSM cannot ignore new forms of networked individualism, neither should it adopt a wholly commercial approach to users conceived as consumers lest they surrender their very mark of distinction, namely a universal orientation and pluralistic provision. This is a major tension for PSM development in the network society context, and one that may be especially acute in small nations with less scope for indigenous commercial media to deliver sustainable market-driven alternatives.

Our aim here is to identify some influential digital myths. Each myth is a pervasive belief commonly asserted as a truth that is repeated in debates about the future of public service media in the digital age. We want to demythologise these claims to better understand the sources of tension for PSM and demonstrate the necessity of paying greater attention to questions of scale and power as one conceptualises the emerging shape of public service media in the network society context.

Myth 1: Digital distribution signals the end of linear television

The end of linear television is often prophesied in digital media markets (Hastings 2016). While the primacy of linear schedules is doubtful in the future, talk of TV’s

demise is premature. Linear TV remains the dominant mode of television consumption in Europe. Audience data from Ireland, for example, shows that despite a variety of devices and viewing options, 90 per cent of television viewing is done live on TV sets. Moreover, the amount has increased by 11 minutes in the past decade (TAM Ireland 2016). While the long-term trajectory for live television might signal decline, the pace is slow in many countries. However, the data highlight marked differences across age groups. The daily time viewing for adults in Ireland averaged 4 hours and 34 minutes, but for 15-24 year olds, the figure was 3 hours 33 minutes (ibid.). This means linear television has distinct value for different audience segments, which should be reflected in PSM strategies.

Digital provision does not signal the immediate end of linear transmission. It is most likely that linear and over-the-top (OTT) services will comprise a typical dual offering for many years in most countries. This puts an additional burden on broadcasters as they must spread commissioning budgets and output across multiple platforms, committing resources at a time when advertising revenues are under pressure and audiences are fragmenting across a proliferation of services and providers. Although digitalisation has not killed linear television, it has disrupted traditional forms of distribution by opening a multitude of new windows and platforms. Larger PSB organisations such as the BBC can cater directly for niche audiences through an assortment of channels. But smaller organisations like S4C and TG4 lack the resources to develop additional channels, especially in this era of funding cuts. For these broadcasters simply having the resources to provide a full daily schedule on one channel with some original content throughout the year is a considerable challenge.

Myth 2: Public service broadcasting is now redundant

European PSM organisations are under increasing pressure to define an appropriate remit and mission within the television landscape (Moe 2011; Cunningham 2015; van Dijk & Poell 2015; EBU 2016a). Digital technologies offer opportunities for plurality of provision and diversity of voice, but also pose challenges as funding must finance multiple services to meet a variety of audience demands (Debrett 2009; Lowell & Berg 2013). However, PSB remains vital to the television sector for 1) shouldering an important share of the risks associated with digitalisation (Iosifidis 2011), 2) developing skills and talents (e.g. through apprenticeships, training initiatives and more stable work contracts traditionally), and 3) addressing problems of market failure in content provision for niche areas including local news, children's programming (Steemers 2017) and the arts (Noonan & Genders 2018). Their contribution to the provision of content is evident in the fact that European PSB organisations invest 84 per cent of their programming expenditure in original content, significantly more than their commercial rivals (EBU 2016b).

As developers of digital platforms (e.g. BBC iPlayer) and content, PSB as PSM are often prime enablers of development in digital infrastructure and the pleasures

of creative storytelling (Sørensen 2014). In many countries PSM organisations have retained market dominance despite fierce competition and dramatic change. As Evans and McDonald argue, they “act as a signal of consistency and predictability in a moment of upheaval” (2014: 167). Ofcom’s 2017 ‘Annual Review of Public Service Broadcasting’ found that in the UK, “public service broadcasting remains highly valued and satisfaction with many aspects is increasing”, and that while “television viewing is changing [...] the PSBs remain at the heart of the overall audience experience” (Ofcom 2017: 2). Moreover, recent research by the EBU (2016a) emphasises PSM’s social value, demonstrating how strong public service media organisations “contribute to building healthy societies, being linked to democratic governance, social cohesion and citizens’ trust in the media”. Finally, we should remember, as Lowe and Berg (2013: 78) argue, that current debates on funding PSM are never only about “economic value, but also socio-political values”.

Myth 3: Digital means power and control shift to the audience

Digital technologies are often celebrated for their democratic potential. This is usually expressed through a framework of ‘consumer choice’ and accessibility. Strikingly, the principle of inclusivity, which is a core public service value, is far less prominent in such discourse. This indicates a major philosophical contrast between PSM as a nationally-regulated service with socio-cultural aims geared to enhancing civil society, and the more laissez-faire philosophy of profit-driven, consolidated global internet corporations that frequently escape national regulatory frameworks and seem “intent on redeveloping cyberspace as retail real estate” (Iosifidis 2016).

Lotz (2014) reminds us that power has always been concentrated at the distribution stage of the television value chain. A result of deregulation is growth in vertical and horizontal integration. A fundamental shift in the prevailing power structure of the audio-visual media sector is unlikely to be accepted without resistance by incumbent distributors: “All too frequently, emergent technologies provide multiplicity and diversity in their infancy, only to be subsumed by dominant and controlling commercial interests as they became more established” (Lotz 2014: 165).

Myth 4: Digital offers universal access to all players

New connections between television providers, telecommunication companies, and technology manufacturers are a defining feature of the digital era (Lotz 2014). This allows a relatively small number of companies to leverage economies of scale and scope across international markets, and presents barriers to entry for small players. As Maria Michalis argues (2016: 143), the emphasis on innovation in media policy (understood largely in technological terms) can create “a vicious circle whereby the targeting of oligopolistic industries creates strong incentives for first-mover advantage and measures that will sustain, if not strengthen, the oligopolistic characteristics on which government interventions and international competitiveness are based”.

Moreover, the powerful interests of multinational companies that are key players in media markets today, like Google, Netflix and Apple, are difficult for national policy makers of even large nations to oppose, even when they wish to do so. This problem was pointed to by Castells long before it became as endemic as it is today:

The network society constitutes socialized communication beyond the mass media system that characterized the industrial society. But it does not represent the world of freedom sung by the libertarian ideology of Internet prophets. It is made up both of an oligopolistic business multimedia system controlling an increasingly inclusive hypertext, and of an explosion of horizontal networks of autonomous local/global communication – and, naturally, of the interaction between the two systems in a complex pattern of connections and disconnections in different contexts. (Castells 2005: 13)

Broadcasters, producers and distributors outside the dominant English-language world face additional difficulties when entering the international marketplace (see Jensen & Waade 2013), and in developing strategic responses to the digital ecology in ways that still address the needs of specific audiences. English is the language of digital technology and the internet, and the most powerful companies are based in the USA. This reality challenges any assumption that the network society facilitates equality of access for all players in the market. The commercial digital environment puts little emphasis on universality and poses a challenge to national regulators. Against many claims of the ‘digital revolution’ is the reality that “digital expansion strategies are not necessarily conducive to greater diversity of content or pluralism” (Doyle 2016: 37). Moreover, specific interventions in digital provision by broadcasters need to be evaluated contextually. We turn to this task next, beginning with an overview of the methods used to research such interventions from within a distinct, collaborative milieu.

Methodology

The findings presented here emerge from empirical insights gained through an Arts and Humanities Research Council funded network examining PSM production in small nations.¹ The project connected international scholars and industry professionals in three workshops, each for one or two days, conducted in 2015–2016. In total, this involved 63 participants from 12 small nations, some of whom also engaged online through publishing blogs and reviews of workshops – thereby extending discussion and debates. Workshop proceedings were transcribed and the results inform our analysis (see <https://smallnationstv.org/>).

The workshops considered two overarching research questions. Firstly, what strategies are minority-language PSM organisations using to compete in the global television market? Secondly, how are these organisations adapting to new communication technologies and is it to their advantage? This qualitative approach was a conscious

intervention in the field of production studies that is premised on respecting the critical acumen and reflexive capabilities of television industry workers who rarely enjoy the time or space to articulate critique of the industries in which they live their lives (see Banks 2017).

This approach is an exercise in co-creating research and findings rather than treating workers in PSB/PSM organisations purely as the external objects of academic investigation. It demands considerable trust on the part of participants to dialogue when the very language and conceptual framing of phenomena may themselves be integral to how academics and television production professionals demarcate their distinct professional repertoires (see Hill et al. 2017). Looking back, our most successful workshops enabled both industry and academic participant observation of one's another's milieu in a comparative international context. This enriched our understandings by providing greater nuance and insight about the complexity of PSM as a professional practice that is embodied in the lives of its workers.

We agree with Eva Bakoy et al. (2016: 6) who noted the insistence of Georgina Born in her landmark ethnography of the BBC that a more anthropological approach need not eradicate critical distance but may yield a productive double consciousness – both empathy and distance. In contrast to the industry/academic engagement elaborated by Annette Hill et al. (2017), our network benefitted from a commonality of interest and perception which those working and producing (whether research or PSM content) in small nations (and perhaps even more so, in minority-languages) share.

It is important to acknowledge these shared understandings of what it means to work within small nations where issues of power are lived and negotiated daily, where the scale, geographic location, and cultural characteristics of one's nation are factors that commonly need to be explained before one can speak to interlocutors from larger dominant global nations. This everyday reality – and the tacit grasp of power it entails – engenders a certain disposition to navigate translation across cultural, national, and linguistic borders. Indeed, this translational imperative may itself be a normative condition of small nationhood. Whatever the distinct tactics employed by individual participants in navigating their small nationhood, they were all intuitively able to grasp the complexity and necessity of translation, something which helps enormously in the disposition and willingness to work across industry and academia.

Digital challenges and opportunities in small nations

Castells and Cardoso (2005) argue that we already inhabit a network society. Our research revealed the immediacy of challenges this presents for PSB organisations in the project of becoming PSM. This is understood as a living, ongoing process without an agreed image of what PSM will look like when accomplished. In our research, the term 'digital' was a recurring focus of professional discourse among television profes-

sionals, as evident in job titles, department affiliations, strategy documents, operating logics, and the professional practices we observed.² There was professional commitment to digitalisation as ‘a good thing’ for small nations, which was rationalised by a need to remain competitive and to be perceived as ‘innovative’ due to its competitive value in media industries.

Historically, small nation broadcasters have tended to have more limited access to international markets and overseas sales than larger media markets, which harness them for additional revenue (Iosifidis 2007; McElroy & Noonan 2016; McElroy et al. 2018). The reward for capturing value from digital provision is the potential for long-term sustainability. Although costly in terms of investment in platforms, content, audience measurement and engagement, digitalisation could deliver future efficiencies. This is the context in which we identify and assess strategies employed by PSB organisations in small nations as they transition into PSM.

Digital practices: Social media engagement and curatorship

The development of a curatorial role and increased social media engagement are two key aspects of emerging digital strategies. In 2012, S4C appointed Huw Marshall to be Digital Manager (until 2016). He pointed to this strategic decision as evidence of how the broadcaster was developing a more tactical use of social media to add value to content and enhance relationships with audiences. This included a shift from what had been a relatively sporadic pattern of posting on S4C’s Facebook site to a deliberate strategy of two posts per day, which encouraged a more selective assessment by the marketing team of its own content sharing. In this way, the digital team implicitly performed a gatekeeping role, exercising value judgments about what might work effectively in this space. Formalising practice also allowed a more precise quantification of activities and trends over time. These metrics can have a direct and powerful impact on strategy (van Dijck & Poell 2015) and should not be considered as value neutral, as underlined by Kosterich and Napoli:

The net effect [of this usage] could be a narrowing of focus on producing only those types of programs that appeal to the types of audiences that actively engage in social TV activity around television programs. The net effect (if any) on television program diversity of the institutionalization of this supplementary market information regime has yet to be determined. (Kosterich & Napoli 2016: 267)

The additional challenge for S4C is how to turn high social media reach into genuine audience engagement. Although a range of possibilities arise for making content more visible through social media platforms, the industry’s understanding of how to assess and produce a return on investment is still emerging. Indeed, the consequences of such investments are yet to be fully realised.

According to Marshall, a central role for anyone with ‘digital’ in their title is to persuade others in the organisation that digital is implicitly in theirs too. Having a

‘Digital Manager’ is tangible evidence of emerging social media and digital logics within broadcasters (van Dijck & Poell 2015). Digital managers advocate ‘digital’ as both strategy and process, such that digital provides a route through the uncertainties that are endemic within media industries. Digital enables practical interventions. For Marshall, a key part of his role at S4C has been testing digital tools to promote and create content, build relationships with audiences, and mobilise external allies. The latter is especially important for PSB where the visibility and articulation of social value is crucial for sustainability.

S4C exemplifies how strategic collaboration by smaller PSB organisations with larger counterparts has benefits but also limitations. In 2014, S4C decided to make its own content available through iPlayer, the BBC’s on-demand service. This collaboration was possible because of a partnership developed between the organisations following major cuts to S4C’s funding in 2010 that contentiously transferred responsibility for the bulk of S4C’s funding from the UK government grant made through the Department of Media, Culture and Sport, to the BBC licence fee.

While S4C remains operationally independent, placing its content on the BBC’s highly developed and well-known iPlayer was part of a strategy to increase the channel’s availability, as S4C chief executive Ian Jones explained: “The great advantage of BBC iPlayer is that it is available on over 650 devices and platforms for free in the UK – which provide new ways to showcase S4C’s excellent content” (cited in BBC 2013). It appears this collaboration has paid off. S4C’s 2016 annual report noted an increase in online viewing sessions from 5.7 million in 2014–2015 to 8.4 million in 2015–2016, the first full year where S4C content was available on iPlayer. This was especially marked by an increase in viewing sessions by viewers outside Wales and across other parts of the UK accessing S4C content.³

However, our analysis found that putting content on another, larger and more powerful broadcaster’s platform also brings problems in data ownership. S4C does not own the audience data for viewing sessions using iPlayer, and is therefore less able to exploit analytics for its own benefit. In the digital economy, the ability to access and manage the analytics of audience engagement on different platforms is an increasingly important lever; to yield such control is a major risk.

Public value and digital innovation: The regulatory response

While digitalisation is part of the everyday reality of broadcasters and integral to all aspects of broadcasting today, many participants felt policy-making and audience measurement had failed to keep pace with changes. They perceived policy-makers across Europe as being inadequately prepared for the digital world, reflecting instead assumptions of the analogue era of mass media. We argue this inadequacy can be partly explained by the deregulation of media industries in recent decades because an ideology of consumer choice and market competition encouraged interventions that were often reactionary, piece-meal and offered a limited diet of possibilities (e.g.

quotas or tax incentives). Furthermore, broadcasting crosses policy domains that include business, culture, education, and community building. Within new nations or in the context of devolved powers, broadcasting can be secondary to more immediate areas of policy-making such as health and education. Consequently, media policy interventions may be difficult to deliver.

The digital era also redefines what broadcasters are and do. For instance, the number of stakeholders involved in policy decision-making has expanded to include global media outlets, telecommunications groups, technology manufacturers, and IT companies. In the digital landscape, the presence of content is less problematic than gaining ready access to it. While technological affordances such as catch-up services exist, audiences will only find content and engage with it if it can be accessed easily on smartphones, tablets and Smart TVs. Emerging players operate as powerful gatekeepers, so questions of power remain highly pertinent – especially in rights negotiations for both content and platform access. Platforms are not neutral routes to content but are themselves businesses with particular priorities and affordances. Regulators, we suggest, have an important part to play in making a diversity of content readily *accessible* (not just available) to audiences.

Regulation may be especially pressing in the case of minority-language communities where the market is not large enough to sustain diverse commercial provision or ensure sufficient traction with large international corporations such as Netflix and YouTube. The financial cost of accessing such platforms and services is a major challenge for publicly funded, smaller broadcasters. For one participant in our network, negotiating rights with suppliers to clear content to be offered across various platforms was “horrendous [...] [W]e thought we were a broadcaster, we want to make content, not negotiate contracts”. Such negotiations can exclude smaller broadcasters from platforms as the high cost of development and content rights prohibits their engagement in every space.

Content rights and apps in public service media

Increasing global competition for content rights is a major trend that can pose disproportionately large challenges for minority-language PSB organisations. As noted by TG4, for example: “Competition for the rights to television programmes and major sporting events is increasing and TG4’s purchasing power is falling [...]. In addition, TG4 holds the unique role of serving Irish language audiences, with this specific statutory role in the Irish broadcast market not required of any other broadcaster in Ireland” (TG4 2016: 9). In many nations that have a variety of language communities, both commercial and majority language PSB organisations have withdrawn from minority-language provision due to deregulation and market forces (such as overseas sales) that favour dominant languages. However, minority-language PSB organisations recognise the value of digitalisation and are responding in diverse ways, including multi-platforming, social media, and user generated content.

Underscoring one of the ‘big advantages’ that digital technology has brought, Lís Ní Dhálaigh (Acquisitions & Output Director for TG4) explained: “Our content is now available worldwide, so it doesn’t matter where you are in the world, you can access the TG4 Irish-language content [...]. It’s allowing us to communicate directly to our audience and to build a relationship directly to our audience, whereas before this we would have been depending on third party advertising platforms.” The opportunities afforded by the media infrastructure that facilitates a network society allow TG4 to expand its audience from the confines of a national border to the substantial global Irish diaspora. Data from TG4’s catch-up service suggests a broad range of genres that appeal to this audience. Cultural genres including music and the arts, along with sport (especially Gaelic Football and Hurling), resonate particularly strongly.

Social media and UGC content are important elements in the strategies of minority-language broadcasters. They provide new spaces for speakers of minority-languages to communicate with each other in ways that make minority-language life visible and audible online (Gruffydd Jones & Uribe-Jongbloed 2013). They complement traditional television’s consumption-only mode, and allow broadcasters to engage in two-way dialogue with vibrant but relatively small communities. As Huw Marshall pointed out, it is especially important for minority-language broadcasters to find and retain younger audiences. TG4, for example, provides 11 Irish language apps for preschool children, “making Irish more accessible and fun for young people worldwide” (TG4 2016: 12). Indeed, some linguists argue that the current era of highly individualised media communications “is characterized by the emergence of communities based on interests in a language or activity in it, rather than necessarily by location” (Kelly-Holmes & Atkinson 2017: 238). From the moment children learn to read and navigate independently online, they are exposed to a swathe of English-language material that is easy to find on channels such as YouTube Kids. As part of its bid to retain 7-15-year olds, S4C explained how they have been innovating by engaging with youngsters as producers of content:

So, we’ve invested, along with the Welsh Government, in projects like Game Tube, which is showing kids how they do walkthroughs for Minecraft [...] if you are making that walkthrough in English you are one of a billion videos on YouTube, if you are doing it in Welsh, you have actually got more of a chance of getting your content noticed and watched. So, you make doing something in Welsh a USP.⁴ (Interview with Huw Marshall, S4C Digital Manager 2016).

While in some digital spheres a minority-language may restrict access to services, for example by not having interfaces and apps in that language, here the Welsh language offers distinction in the Anglophone internet world. The small number of Welsh speakers – constituting an intimate networked society of speakers – can be a boon to the proto-celebrity eager to connect and make a mark online.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the analytic value of both small nations and minority-language media as approaches for identifying formations of global power that underscore the importance of PSM in a networked society. In the light of important digital myths that circulate in debates about the future of public service media, we have argued for greater attention to how inequalities of global power that characterise the network society are negotiated, often with great agility and collaboration, by smaller public service broadcasters. We have shown how digital platforms can, and already do, help achieve objectives that are core to public media's public purposes. For example, digital technologies can enhance language learning and raise the visibility and reach of languages beyond traditional strongholds. However, major structural issues remain.

New empowered actors are accumulating valuable resources (especially data, advertising revenue and attention) and exercising gatekeeping power to the detriment of less powerful players that lack the necessary resources to compete successfully. The pervasive logic of neoliberalism has not only reduced the regulation of global media organisations, but helped drive down public funding. Retaining funding at a level that allows genuine innovation and the leveraging of digital resources is a major challenge in making the transition to PSM. Public media need government support in formulating credible remits that enable broadcasters to develop their services in the digital environment, whilst retaining a clear sense of their public purposes and values.

Reducing PSM to a tool merely to plug holes caused by market failure in commercial media not only diminishes the diverse cultural, social, and economic values of their offerings, but also excludes the distinct role that minority-language PSB organisations play in ensuring linguistic vibrancy and diversity. Sustained, direct engagement with scholars, industry professionals, and policy-makers through our international research network led us to identify this as a crucial moment in determining the abilities and sustainability of PSB organisations to deliver fully on their potential value to the publics of small nations in a globalised media system. We believe effective policy intervention is urgently required. Policy-makers and regulators need to think creatively about how actively to support pluralism in an online environment where the dominance of a few global corporations can squeeze out smaller players and languages. Ensuring the network society is equitable and inclusive requires active scholarly interventions in media policy and public debates to bring nuance and precision to the technologically deterministic character of digital discourse, and to provide positive examples of the enduring salience of public service in media. This is vital for clarifying the core values of PSM independence, universality, and plurality in twenty-first century networked societies.

Notes

1. A series of collaborative studies were conducted by the Centre for Media and Culture in Small Nations at the University of South Wales with academic and industry partners. The research reported in this chapter was funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council international research network scheme (AH/M011348/1). Television production in small nations was led by McElroy and Noonan with Anne Marit Waade at Aarhus University (Denmark), and with support from the European Broadcasting Union, S4C, TG4 and Royal Television Society Wales.
2. S4C is the UK's sole Welsh-language public service broadcaster. In the S4C annual report 2016 the term 'digital' appears 35 times, compared to 17 times in the 2010 report.
3. The term 'viewing sessions' is commonly used by UK broadcasters to refer to catch-up viewing online.
4. Short for 'unique selling proposition'.

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Public Service Media and Ecosystem Sustainability

Towards Effective Partnerships in Small Media Markets

Dirk Wauters & Tim Raats

Abstract

Agreements and charters for Europe's public service broadcasters increasingly include ambitions for developing partnerships and engaging in collaboration. The recent management contract of VRT in Flanders specifically includes a new strategic objective to implement partnerships in order to strengthen the wider media ecosystem, including cross-sectoral media partnerships and co-operation with private media companies. This chapter clarifies relevant concepts and offers a framework for the development of partnership strategy that premised on a belief that public service media should be a central node in a networked media system. Research on ecosystems in business literature structures our framework and offers metrics for evaluating media ecosystem health and sustainability. The metrics are illustrated through an empirical analysis of the media ecosystem in Flanders. Risks and benefits of public service media partnerships are assessed. The practical framework specifies criteria for selecting, assessing and managing partnership proposals and serve as building blocks for public service media organisations to make ex ante estimates about which partnerships will be most beneficial for public media in the light of its public service mission.

Keywords: collaboration, media metrics, ex ante evaluation, management contract, development strategy

Introduction¹

Castells (1996) proposed the concept of the 'networked enterprise' as the organisational form a firm should adopt to suit the conditions of uncertainty and unpredictability in a networked society environment. The strengths of this form are mainly in the shift from the vertical bureaucracies of the past to a horizontal structure enabled by digital technology to connect dispersed organisational nodes and integrate with external firms (Corolla 2006). In this chapter, we explore the development of public service media (PSM) as a networked enterprise by focusing on two key concepts: the *media ecosystem* to describe the networked environment for PSM, and the implementation

Wauters, Dirk & Raats, Tim (2018). Public Service Media and Ecosystem Sustainability. Towards Effective Partnerships in Small Media Markets in Gregory Ferrell Lowe, Hilde Van den Bulck, Karen Donders (eds.) *Public Service Media in the Networked Society*. Göteborg: Nordicom.

of *partnerships* as the practical means for establishing network links between the PSM organisation and external firms and organisations.

Research in media economics and policy regarding PSM emphasises the importance of public media for the sustainability of the media ecosystem as a whole (Collins 2011; Davies 2013; Barwise & Picard 2014; Raats & Donders 2017). Building or renewing partnership with audiences, civil society organisations and public institutions are often considered to be ‘natural allies’ of PSM, and were earlier proposed as a prerequisite for PSM to remain crucial for society (Murdock 2005; Jakubowicz 2008; EBU 2014). Collaboration with private industry has only recently become a focus of discussion and debate as PSM has begun to collaborate with the private sector. The BBC started incorporating public-private partnerships as the ‘default’ logic in 2008, resulting in specific commitments towards newspapers, technical facilitators, other broadcasters and distributors (Raats 2012).

Collaboration with private industry is emphasised in contemporary media policy in response to criticisms about the position and activities of PSM that are claimed to hinder market initiative and growth in the digital media environment. Policy-makers promote collaboration as a remedy. But current approaches for developing the partnership agenda are problematic for two reasons. First, the focus of policymakers is generally limited to PSM organisations only and tend to overlook the extent to which private players are actually willing to collaborate with them. Second, attempts to develop a partnership agenda for PSM have been lacklustre as evident in vague and arbitrary commitments. They predominantly highlight *who* should be sustained (mostly larger legacy firms in mass media) rather than *what* needs to be sustained – namely, an economically stable, diverse, high-quality, and productive media market (Raats & Donders 2017).

In this chapter we argue that both problems can be resolved by conceptualising the role and position of PSM in a networked media environment as an *ecosystem*. In our view, the partnership agenda is only useful when tied explicitly to the benefits this can provide for the media ecosystem as such. This grounds a more coherent approach to developing partnerships in three interdependent dimensions: 1) a characterisation of media as an ecosystem, 2) defining goals that policymakers and media operators want to sustain and further develop, and 3) translating these goals into a partnership agenda where PSM acts in ways that will benefit the media ecosystem as a whole, but without damaging its own distinctiveness. This framework offers a more coherent partnership agenda because it defines the concept of a media ecosystem as the basis for applying metrics to assess its health and sustainability.

In the second part of the chapter, we apply the characterization of the ecosystem to the Flanders region in Belgium to define how and when partnerships between VRT and third party private players are in the best mutual interests of the ecosystem as such, and clearly beneficial for VRT. A team of VRT staff and scholars, including the authors, collaborated to establish a structure for the organisation’s partnership ambitions. The framework and criteria resemble earlier *ex ante* evaluation schema for value

and impact, especially the ‘public value test’ in the UK (Donders & Moe 2013). Our framework provides building blocks that will be useful for other public media firms to develop ex ante evaluations of which partnerships are most beneficial to engage. The framework was adopted in 2016 by VRT as an integral part of its partnership strategy.

The evidence is derived from two sources: 1) a media economic analysis of primary and secondary market data, and 2) benchmarking legal and strategic provisions for PSM partnerships in various European PSM organisations. We begin with a review of business literature about the ecosystem metaphor to develop insight about how highly distributed networked structures typically function in industries today.

The media ecosystem as framework for partnerships

The ecosystem metaphor in business is a relatively recent phenomenon that provides a new framework for evaluating industry health and deciding what constitutes an industry in the first place. The metaphor was first adopted in the U.S. information technology and telecom sectors and has been adopted in other sectors, including media. It is especially attractive for media given increasing digitalisation, convergence, and the popularity of technology-driven business models. We follow Williamson (2012) in understanding a business ecosystem as a network of organisations and individuals that co-evolve their capabilities and roles to align investments in ways that create additional value and/or improve efficiency.

The ecosystem notion was coined by a botanist, Arthur Tansley in 1935. He found it useful for describing a localised community of living organisms interacting with each other and their particular environment (Willis 1997). James Moore introduced the business ecosystem perspective as a strategic planning concept in 1993 to facilitate the understanding of the company as part of a complex assortment of industries and, what we now call, stakeholders. In a business ecosystem, companies co-evolve their capabilities in response to innovation. They work co-operatively and competitively at the same time to support new products, satisfy customer needs, and eventually incorporate the next round of innovations

Hannon (1997) explored the analogy between biology and economics to demonstrate common features in their ‘ecologies’. Both study dynamic, organically-based systems that have methods of production, exchange, capital stocks and storage (see also Peltoniemi 2006). Thus, symbiosis and co-evolution are key characteristics. And just as biological ecosystems consist of a variety of interdependent species, business ecosystems analogously depend on interdependent networks of organisations for sustainability. In such networks, each member contributes to the ecosystem’s overall wellbeing and is dependent on other members for survival. Reciprocally, the survival and success of each member is influenced by the ecosystem as a holistic entity that is in continuous evolution (Iansiti & Levien 2004a; Makinen 2007). There are differences, too. In a business ecosystem, actors engage in planning and are able to envision

the future with some accuracy (Iansiti 2004b; Peltoniemi 2006). Moreover, business ecosystems compete for members rather than only against them. Finally, business ecosystems aim at delivering innovations, whereas natural ecosystems aim at mere survival (ibid).

A business ecosystem is centred around a leading company, typically characterised as the 'keystone' because it regulates overall functioning (Iansiti & Levien 2004a). Its actions influence the behaviours and consequences for itself and all other ecosystem members. Other terms for the keystone firm are 'ecosystem leader' (Moore 1993), 'platform leader' (Cusumano & Gawer 2002), and 'hub' (Dobson 2006). Sustainability is a function of the ecosystem's overall health, which depends on the extent to which it fosters the durable growth of opportunities for its members and improves the benefits delivered to customers (Iansiti & Levien, 2004b).

The literature on business ecosystems adds new and useful elements for the analysis of competition in media industries and markets. First, ecosystem thinking recognises the importance of competition not only *within* but also *between* ecosystems (Dobson 2006). New entrants in media industries such as Google and Netflix have established powerful global ecosystems that invade and erode the 'incumbent' multi-sided media ecosystem in domestic environments for audiences and advertising. Second, the co-evolution of members that comprise a business ecosystem implies that incumbent actors who mainly competed before must now also co-operate at the same time.

Bengtsson (2000) argues that the most complex, but also the most advantageous relationship, is 'coopetition' where firms co-operate and compete simultaneously. Co-operation (or collaboration) within an ecosystem describes the process of companies working or acting together in a partnership agreement for their mutual benefit, as opposed to working in competition for solely self-interested benefit. Implementing co-operation requires formal agreements that specify objectives and goals, means and governance, and the purview of the intended co-operation. A partnership involves the sharing of various assets, including finance, skills, information and other resources in the joint pursuit of common goals. Partnerships can be implemented at narrow operational levels, such as co-operation between news media (e.g. Dailey 2013; Hatcher 2017), or at broader strategic levels such as co-investment for research and development or the joint development of new platforms (e.g. the YouView platform in the UK).

For PSM, the audio-visual media ecosystem is comprised of all the companies and interactions between companies that contribute directly or indirectly to the creation of and investments in audio-visual and digital content services. This indicates the combination of the *media content* value chain (commercial and public service broadcasters, distributors, production companies, film, print, online, etc.), the wider *creative industries* (the primary focus of PSM partnerships), and actors in the *e-commerce*, *media-tech* and *internet technology* industries. The integration of these levels is especially important for small markets, as we later demonstrate.

The health and wellbeing of a business ecosystem

Iansiti and Levien (2004b) explored the makings of a healthy business ecosystem to develop measures of the extent to which the ecosystem provides durable growth opportunities for every member and dependent. They identified three factors that define the performance of an ecosystem, taken as indicators of its health.

First, one must assess the *productivity* of the business ecosystem. In a biological ecosystem, the most important measure of health is its ability to effectively convert non-biological inputs, such as sunlight and mineral nutrients, into living outputs – populations of organisms, or biomass. The business equivalent is a network's ability to consistently transform technology and other raw materials of innovation into lower costs and new products. The second factor is *robustness*. To provide durable benefits for a species that depend on a biological ecosystem, it must be able to adapt and persist in the face of environmental changes. Similarly, the durability of a business ecosystem depends on its capacity to survive disruptions such as unforeseen technological change. The third factor is *innovation* (or niche creation). In addition to productivity and robustness, a healthy biological ecosystem supports a diversity of species (Iansiti & Levien 2004b). Innovation, or niche creation, is the critical mechanism by which business ecosystems increase diversity over time. This diversity results in new alternatives and choices for the customers that depend on an ecosystem (Iansiti 2006).

On the basis of these three factors, Iansiti and Levien propose metrics for evaluating business ecosystem health. Although all the measures will not apply in every circumstance, they provide an effective set of tools for assessment.

- Productivity: total factor productivity, productivity improvement over time, and delivery of innovations.
- Robustness: survival rates, persistence of ecosystem structure and predictability, limited obsolescence, and continuity of use experience and use cases.
- Innovation: variety and value creation of new options.

Linking these indicators to the health of public and private broadcasters, in accordance with the work of Simon (2013), we identify metrics and apply these as assessment measures for VRT.

Translating the partnership agenda in Flanders

In Flanders, a management agreement between VRT and the Flemish Government is negotiated every five years. A focus on equilibrium in the media system is characteristic and motivated, for example, the 1989 decision to only grant one commercial player (VTM) a license to operate alongside the public broadcaster. Since then, govern-

ment has stressed the importance of a ‘pax media’ between all Flemish media players (Raats & Pauwels 2013).² The emphasis on partnerships since 2010 can be usefully understood in that context.

The previous management agreement (2012–2016) showed the problematic nature of enforcing partnerships in specific obligations and measurable criteria. Commitments remained vague and mostly oriented towards sustaining the (power) positions of legacy media players, rather than supporting the development of new content and services. Negotiations for the 2016–2020 management agreement features a more focused approach.³ In the new agreement, a preamble sketching disruptive changes in the media sector drives the requirement for VRT to contribute to the anchoring and sustainability of the Flemish media ecosystem. Implementing partnerships is one of the seven strategic objectives for VRT to strengthen the wider media ecosystem, including cross-sectoral media partnerships and co-operation with private media companies. This specifically includes collaboration with newspapers, distributors, producers, the music sector, and media tech companies and start-ups.

In Belgium, the Flemish market displays typical characteristics of a small nation (limited number of players, limited export and domestic markets, and language differences) – see Puppis 2009. At the same time, Flanders has high proportions of domestic programming and viewing, and a flourishing domestic production sector. The Flemish television market is dominated by three broadcasting groups: the public broadcaster VRT and two private broadcasting groups, Mediaaan and SBS. In 2014, the total audience share for VRT and the two private broadcasting groups was 81.2 per cent, with an HHI concentration index of 0.26, indicating strong concentration in the audience market.⁴ The penetration of SVoD over-the-top platforms is currently at the European average of 11 per cent of households, but much lower than in the UK or the Northern countries (EBU 2016). Although private broadcasters and publishers are concentrated, the independent production sector is highly fragmented – consisting of more than 40 companies (VRM 2017).

We illustrate the health of the Flemish media ecosystem by benchmarking selected metrics with other European countries. We compare three metrics for the *productivity* of the ecosystem: the output of the TV ecosystem, the total investment in original (or local language) content; the quality of the original content as perceived by audiences; and the diversity of ecosystem output (i.e. the proportion of local content produced by the commercial broadcasters compared to the public broadcaster). We then discuss the *robustness* of the ecosystem by identifying threats to the ecosystem and highlighting areas for sustainability development in the ecosystem. Since the metrics for productivity also address the two key metrics for innovation (variety and value creation) there will be no separate discussion on innovation. Space doesn’t permit a full treatment, but the results will demonstrate the utility of the framework we propose.

The productivity of the Flanders media ecosystem

For the first productivity metric (output), we draw on a study by the European Audiovisual Observatory (Kevin 2015) to compare the total original content programming investments⁵ per capita by the major TV channels versus the country populations for selected European countries. While the selection of countries is not comprehensive, the comparison yields several insights. First, Flanders ranks third among the countries in terms of total original content budgets per capita, behind the UK and Finland. The ecosystem therefore is productive, relative to its population size. Second, there is a U-shaped curve between the total original content investment per capita and the population size of the countries. Small European countries, in particular in Northern and Western Europe, invest higher amounts in original content per capita compared to several larger countries.⁶ Referring to the framework of Hallin and Mancini (2009), we observe that the levels of original content investment per capita are lower for countries belonging to the ‘mediterranean polarized pluralist’ model than countries belonging to the other two media models.⁷

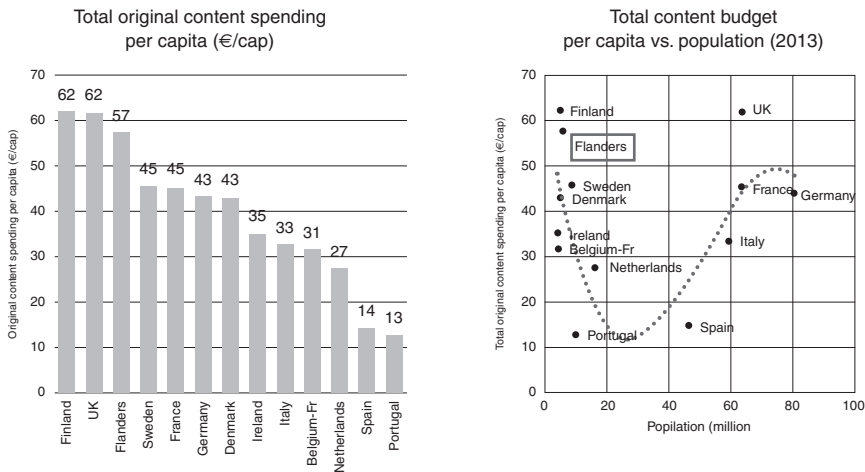


Figure 1. Original content budgets per capita and relationship versus country population

Source: European Audiovisual Observatory

A second metric is the quality of the TV content, as perceived by the audience. From a European audience data report (IPNetwork 2014) we categorised the top rated 20 programmes by genre and origin, and ranked the countries in terms of quality of the local content by differential scoring for several genres.⁸ Our analysis focuses on the share of local drama/crime series and news programmes versus foreign acquired programmes, specifically US originated. As highlighted in Figure 2 below, the countries with the highest original content spend per capita also had the highest number of domestic TV drama series or crime series in the Top 20 most watched programmes in 2013.

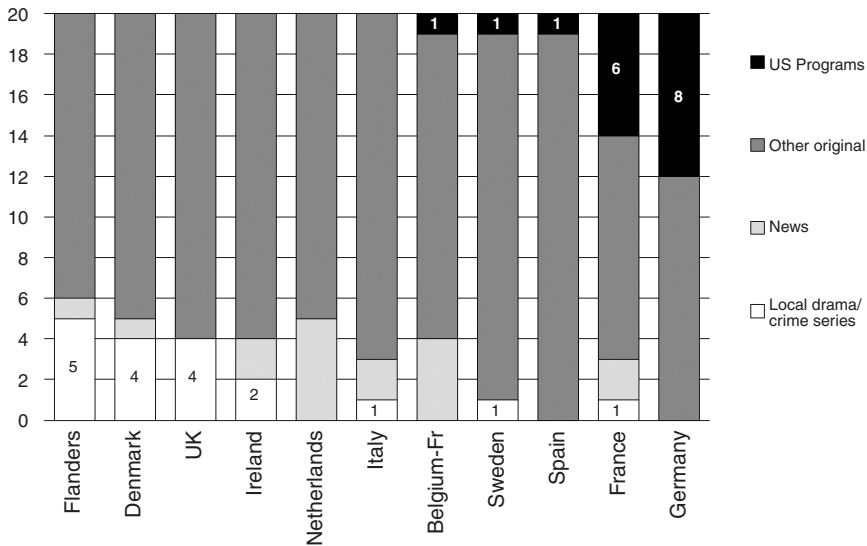


Figure 2. Top 20 audience programs by original content genre vs acquired programs (2013)

Source: IP Network Television Facts

As shown in Figure 2, Flanders leads the way with five TV drama series in the top 20 TV programmes. All programmes in the top 20 for Flanders along with Denmark, the UK and Ireland are original content or sports programmes. By contrast, eight out of the top 20 most watched programmes in Germany (40 per cent) originate in the US, and in France this pertains to six out of 20. Although the dataset is small and focused only on the highest ratings of the top 20 programmes during the year, it raises two questions that merit further research.

First, the higher total original content spend in the top countries is co-related with a higher appreciation by audiences for local drama or crime series and news programmes. Second, France and Germany appear as outliers for original content spend. Other factors may be at work, such as local taste and the adaptation of foreign programmes through dubbing versus subtitles (Bondebjerg et al. 2015).

As a final productivity metric, we analysed the diversity of original content production and present this as the 'leverage' ratio in each country, i.e. the original content spend of commercial broadcasters versus spend by the publicly funded broadcaster. Using data from the European Audiovisual Observatory (Kevin 2015), the original content budgets per capita of both categories of broadcasters and the leverage ratio are represented for each country in Figure 3. Within the top countries in total original content spend, the leverage ratio is highest in the UK⁹, followed by Finland and Sweden. In Flanders, the leverage ratio is 0.6 since the majority of original content is made by the public broadcaster. The analysis provides insights for government policy.

Governments should strive to maximise both the total original content spending by the ecosystem and the leverage ratio. This not only generates the maximum output of original content by the ecosystem while optimising government funding of the public broadcaster, but also preserves a competitive playing field between the public and the commercial broadcasters.

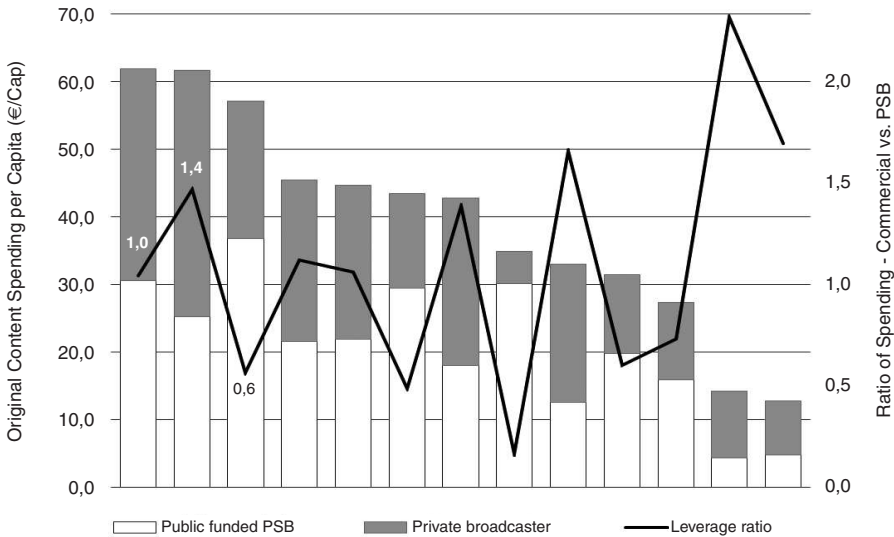


Figure 3. Original content spending per capita of public vs. commercial broadcasters and 'leverage ratio'

Source: European Audiovisual Observatory

The lower leverage ratio in Flanders is a concern, particularly given the high dependency of commercial broadcasters on television advertising. As advertising revenues are under pressure, original content budgets are being adjusted downward. This is achieved via strategies such as changing the genre mix of original content from expensive genres (drama) to cheaper genres, increased acquisition of foreign content to replace local content (the price difference can be up to 11 times higher), lowering risk by moving to deficit financing of external productions, and vertical integration by moving more productions in-house (Econopolis 2017).

The robustness of the Flanders media ecosystem

An analysis of the weaknesses of the ecosystem and the corresponding driving factors helps to identify key areas for improvement and to define metrics for the sustainability of the media ecosystem. One trend that exerts pressure on the domestic media ecosystem is changing use patterns and viewer fragmentation, which occurs at several levels. First, traditional TV set viewing is evolving towards multi-screen video consumption

and ‘on-demand’ forms of content distribution and monetisation. Second, fragmentation occurs within the traditional ‘linear viewing’ as well, resulting in a ‘greying’ of the demographics for local television. The average age of Flemish TV viewers is now 53.3 years, or 12 years older than the median age of citizens (41.2 years). Like the loss of valuable species in a natural ecosystem, younger viewers and ‘digital natives’ are leaving the ‘traditional’ TV ecosystem and migrating to new platforms (Econopolis 2017).

A second trend is strongly related to the previous – a shift in advertising markets. New technological developments and changes in audience behaviour have impacted advertising. The three changes that have the largest impact on the advertising model are 1) the fragmentation of media consumption, 2) new measurement and analysis technologies, and 3) the competitiveness of television against internet TV in terms of targeted advertising. While linear television still attracts the largest share of advertising budgets for all media in Flanders, the revenues have been stable in recent years while internet advertising has grown strongly, although mainly at the expense of print advertising.¹⁰ Advertisers are continuously adjusting their marketing budgets to maximise the sales response curve for advertising investment. As the time spent on print media declines and the time on internet and mobile media grows, advertising revenues are shifting towards internet content providers (Econopolis 2017).

Within internet advertising, new global disruptors are taking an increasing share of the total advertising market. The share for Google and Facebook has grown from 40 per cent to 54 per cent in recent years, whereas the share taken by traditional, local publishers has declined to less than a quarter of the total. This means that for every euro that shifts from print to internet advertising, more than 75 per cent ‘leaks’ out of the local ecosystem to benefit mainly foreign market players (Caudron et al. 2014).

Third, there is a shift in the sources of revenue into the media ecosystem. In Flanders, the majority share of the inflows come from consumer payments (57 per cent) that comprise the largest part of subscription payments to distributors. Of the other sources of revenue, 24 per cent comes from advertising, 16 per cent from the government through the TV portion of total VRT funding and subsidies, and a mere 1 per cent is provided by export revenues (Caudron et al. 2014).

Table 1. Sources of funds into the Flemish media ecosystem

	2012		2015		CAGR growth (in per cent p.a.)
	in million €	in per cent	in million €	in per cent	
Consumer	740	55	801	57	2,7
Advertising	338	25	340	24	0,2
Government	242	18	227	16	-2,1
Export	10	1	13	1	9
Financing	11	1	16	1	13
Total	1 340		1 397		1,4

When looking at the growth of the funding sources from 2012 to 2015, we observe that the share of consumer payments to distributors has grown in recent years while the share of direct flows to the broadcasters, i.e. advertising and government funding, have declined. As a result, retransmission disputes between distributors and broadcasters have significantly risen in recent years (Evens 2014).

Our analysis illustrates challenges for preserving the financial health of the Flanders TV ecosystem in the future. Advertising and government funding are not expected to grow, so the growth will need to come from consumer spending and smaller revenue sources, especially export and external financing. Although there is opportunity to generate more export sales and increase external financing, those revenues currently generate only a tiny fraction of total funding and have a small impact on total funding for the Flemish ecosystem. Finally, broadcasting economics penalise the financing and production of original content by broadcasters in smaller countries because it has limited possibilities for export appeal.

Developing an operational framework and criteria for evaluating partnerships

Based on the characterization of the ecosystem and assessment of what needs to be sustained and developed in the Flemish media ecosystem above, a series of objectives and criteria can be developed to foster a partnership agenda for VRT. Important to note is that the criteria in our framework apply specifically to partnerships with private players, and the outcome of the partnership test is not meant as a binding regulatory measure. The key principle is that partnerships will be considered eligible when they create a positive impact on the media ecosystem as such and simultaneously reinforce the societal mission of VRT. To assess this principle, specific sets of criteria were defined to implement the framework.

The first set evaluates the *positive impact on the ecosystem* of the partnership proposal by examining the expected value of the partnership proposal according to the health metrics of the ecosystem in the key dimensions of productivity, robustness and innovation, as described in the contextualization and analysis above.

The second set of criteria evaluates the *impact on consumers and on competition*. If the impact of the partnership on either of these groups is negative, the partnership will not be initiated. The impact on the consumer concerns both the negative substitution effects and the positive market creation effects. Key aspects to be considered are the benefits to consumers and whether the partnership increases investment and may lead to an increase in consumer choice. The impact on competition is evaluated on aspects that include: impact on market access, abuse of market position, cross-subsidisation from VRT to other market players, or repeated exclusive co-operation that may bring harm to other market players. The table below schematizes the criteria for the ecosystem.

Table 2. Criteria for assessing partnership potential for the ecosystem

Criteria for expected value from the partnership; evaluate whether...	Impact on consumers and on competition
The level of investment in original content is increased or maintained, both directly and/or indirectly	Increased investments
The cooperation increases (or maintains) the diversity of the media content and/or services	Increased consumer choice
The cooperation contributes to the quality of content and/or services	Impact on market access
The cooperation increases the access and/or comfort of local content and/or services	Abuse of market position, cross-subsidisation from VRT to other market players
Creation of economic value add (new revenues, cost sharing, new investment)	Repeated exclusive cooperation that may bring harm to other market players
The cooperation increases or is needed for innovation in the media ecosystem	
The cooperation contributes to an increased knowledge or know-how for the actors in the ecosystem	
(All these criteria do not need to be cumulatively fulfilled)	

Criteria with respect to the *impact on the public service mission of VRT* are classified into two categories: 1) the contribution to the public service remit of VRT, defined in the key public purposes in the management agreement; and 2) ensuring no harm for the independence and integrity of VRT or its operations – as derived from a benchmark of editorial guidelines in various public broadcasters in a 2016 study (see Raats 2016). Table 3 summarizes the criteria for the impact on the public service mission of VRT.

Table 3. Criteria for assessing partnership potential for public service broadcasting

Criteria for the contribution of the partnership to the public service mission of VRT	Criteria for the independence and integrity of VRT and impact on the operations and financial results of VRT
Relevant for all	<i>Independence and integrity of VRT:</i>
Trustworthy, high quality, distinctive information	VRT maintains end responsibility for its own offering
Cultural and educational mission	Core values of the PSB cannot be harmed
Public value add for sports and entertainment	VRT may evaluate beforehand whether potential partners can be included. Some partners could be excluded, cooperation with others could require extra care
Diversity, identity and community building	The VRT and/or its brands are always recognizable in the cooperation
Digital formats, narrative formats, innovation	
(At least one of the above criteria needs to be fulfilled)	<i>Impact on the operations and financial results of VRT:</i>
	The economic value add for VRT (new revenues, new business models, cost reduction)
	Contribution to the VRT competencies or know-how
	Enables more efficient or effective execution of operations
	VRT has the competencies and resources to manage the partnership
	The partnership conforms to the governance structure and legal obligations of VRT

If there is a too large negative impact on the independence or integrity of VRT, the proposed partnership will not be acceptable. And likewise, if the impact of the partnership on the operational working of VRT is too negative, the partnership will not be accepted. Priority partnerships score high on both dimensions.

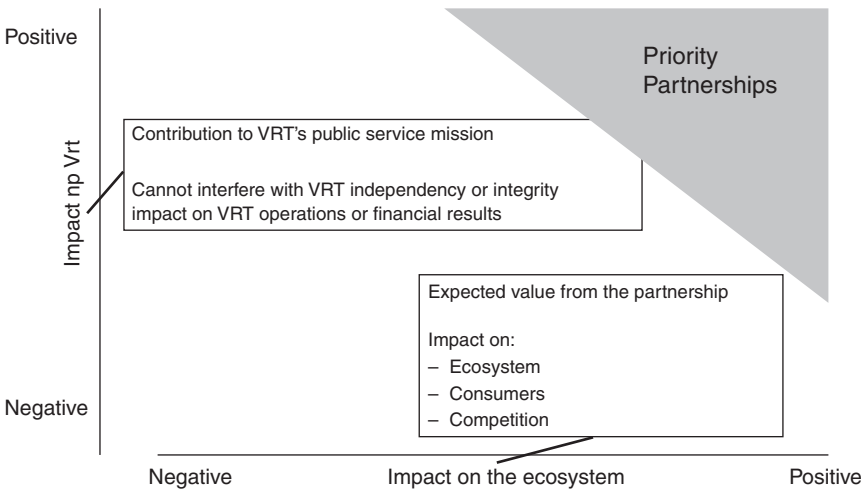


Figure 4. Partnership framework

At the time of publication, this framework was being tested to determine the validity for ex ante estimations based on existing public-private partnerships VRT was involved in, and plans for partnerships proposed in the past years. One specific case study was VRT Sandbox, an initiative launched in co-operation with the EBU that offers technology start-ups and innovative organisations in media technology the opportunity to test their products in an operational production environment. This collaborative approach allows companies to test new media technologies and VRT gets a head start in evaluating new potential products and processes. Sandbox project results are shared with other ecosystem actors.

Applying the evaluation framework, VRT Sandbox delivers a positive value for the ecosystem in terms of access and comfort, economic surplus, and support for innovation and increased knowhow. There is no negative impact on consumers or on competition. From VRT's perspective, the initiative contributes to VRT's digital presence and innovation, creates economic and added value, increases know-how and the potential for enhanced operational efficiency. In sum, this is a partnership worth pursuing.

Conclusion:

Public service media as a keystone in the media ecosystem

The strategic partnership objective is an opportunity for PSM to solidify its position as a 'keystone species' in an increasingly interlinked network of media players. PSM's role and position are thereby both defining and defined by the performance of the environmental ecosystem.

Based on the literature review and our empirical analysis of the Flemish media ecosystem, there are several reasons why PSM should assume a keystone role. First, the incumbent domestic media ecosystem must compete effectively with disruption caused by new entrants. One or more incumbent firms in the ecosystem must have a keystone role. PSM has served that role for decades, rather well, so it is more efficient and secure for the ecosystem if PSM continues in this role. Second, given that PSM in many European countries accounts for more than half of the investment in original (local language) content, co-operation efforts will not achieve sufficient scale or scope if PSM does not have this role. Third, the PSM benefits from a stable funding mechanism – the licence fee or government funding is a better overall guarantee of robustness than more short-term market-driven revenues and profit imperatives among its commercial counterparts. Fourth, governments in Europe have long used PSM as a policy lever and this is guaranteed by EU treaty. PSM can most readily be used to foster co-operation in media because business ecosystems are self-organising and co-operation cannot otherwise be implemented by decree. The Flemish government has given VRT the strategic objective of establishing partnerships but left the operational implementation up to VRT management, subject to periodic review of the outcomes. Finally, European PSM's already have a pan-European network (the EBU) that facilitates knowledge and best-practice sharing of innovative approaches, services and developments. Hence, if a partnership agenda is to be part of a management agreement, as for VRT today, resources to foster co-operation that mutually benefits the domestic media ecosystem are most logical and reasonable for PSM.

Also for PSM, there are benefits for adopting a partnership strategy. A strategic benefit is the explicit legitimization of PSM as a 'keystone species' in the media ecosystem today, and therefore a market-strengthening and long-term contributor to its overall health. Second, by developing the framework for partnerships, PSM can articulate a vision for the ecosystem and partnership goals that is specific to the roles and functions of the public service remit in media. Finally, there are direct benefits for PSM resulting from specific partnerships that are both beneficial for the ecosystem and for the organisation.

There are, however, several risks that need to be managed. Firstly, there are various types of implementation risks in developing partnerships within an ecosystem (Adner 2006; Makinen & Dedehayir 2012): 'initiative risk' (the feasibility of the partnership and its success potential), 'interdependence risk' (the amount of dependence on the co-operating partners to deliver their part of complementary innovations or deliverables); and 'integration risk' (the likelihood that a given innovation will be successfully

integrated in downstream sub-systems and effectively deployed). Thus, risk management needs to be a major element of a PSM's partnership strategy.

A second risk lies in potentially unrealistic expectations about the capability of PSM to effectively strengthen the overall ecosystem given problems related to budgetary and operational constraints. Regarding the latter, commercial sector pressure on the PSM to pull back from online development is a significant concern.

A third risk is pressure from other actors for PSM to engage in partnerships that could compromise its essential public remit or negatively impact its competitive position, operations or financial results. A clear proactive statement of the framework and criteria for PSM to use in establishing partnerships is necessary to alleviate this.

Finally, and most importantly, PSM would be the primary (or worse, the sole) instrument of government policy for strengthening the domestic media ecosystem. But the biological ecosystem literature clearly indicates that transforming an ecosystem involves all species and this suggests the need for a paradigm shift among all the key actors and stakeholders to achieve effective change (Meadows 1999; Parris 2003). The trade-offs indicate that VRT can't be the sole policy instrument for strengthening Flanders' media ecosystem. A broader stakeholder consensus needs to be created for a shared vision of sustainable development that is necessary to establish indicators to both direct and monitor progress. The case of Flanders illustrates the difficulties of implementing partnerships as enforceable commitments, and the risk that a focus on partnerships and sustainability could mainly support a status quo that only benefits legacy players rather than the ecosystem as a whole. Moreover, the interests of private firms are not always identical with those of audiences or in favour of the sustainability they set out to defend (e.g. vertical concentration, limiting access, etc.), and not all private players want a partnership with public broadcasters.

The framework for PSM and partnership presented in this chapter was developed to come to a more coherent partnership agenda that is based on what needs to be sustained and what needs to be developed in the media ecosystem. By directing the partnership implementation towards areas that generate the most value for the media ecosystem and communicating and applying the framework and criteria for creating and monitoring partnerships, VRT can contribute to strengthening the domestic media ecosystem. This aspect of development in public service media goes to the practical heart of the roles and functions of PSM in a networked society.

Notes

1. The authors would like to thank Ms. Lut Vercruyse (Director of Strategy, VRT) and Prof. Dr. Karen Donders for their helpful input and feedback.
2. This monopoly on advertising was later overruled by the Court of Justice of the EU, which deemed it incompatible with internal market legislation. In 1996, a second commercial broadcaster, VT4 (now Vier and Vijf, part of the SBS Belgium group) was launched.
3. In the current management contract (2016-2020), the word 'collaboration' appears no less than 40 times, a strong increase from the 19 and 23 times in two previous 4-year agreements.

4. The Herfindahl-Hirschman index is a measure of the concentration of a market and is calculated as the sum of the squares of the market shares of the market actors. A factor above 0,25 indicates strong concentration of a market.
5. IHS splits the programming budgets of broadcasters in 3 groups: original content, sports, and acquired content. The broadcasters included in the study represent 70-80 per cent of market share in the countries. These broadcasters typically account for more than 90 per cent of the total original content budgets in the countries.
6. This finding of a larger proportion of domestic programming in small countries compared to several larger nations was already reported as an unforeseen finding in an analysis of the broadcast economics of small countries by Picard (2011).
7. The countries in the 'mediterranean polarized pluralist' model in this chart are: France, Italy, Spain and Portugal. The other two models of the Hallin-Mancini framework are the 'Northern European Democratic Corporatist' and the 'North Atlantic Liberal' model.
8. The scoring system used is: 2 pts for each drama/crime series or movie, 1 pt for each news program, 0 for other local content and -1 for each US program in the Top 20 audience TV programs.
9. ITV is grouped among the commercial broadcasters.
10. Internet advertising consists of search, display and classified advertising.

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Section III

Audiences, Distribution and Service Challenges

Distribution Dilemmas for Public Service Media

Evidence from the BBC

Maria Michalis

Abstract

This chapter draws on critical infrastructure studies to deliberate on the growing importance of the distribution of public service media content in the networked society and encourage citizen-user engagement in distribution. The author critiques the notion of ‘networked society’ and examines the emerging television environment to draw attention to transformations as well as persistent continuities. The complexity of media distribution creates dilemmas for public service media, as the BBC case study shows. If public service media is about content that is critical to the functioning of democratic societies, for enhancing social cohesion and promoting cultural diversity through investment in original content, then how that content is found and how it reaches people are crucially important questions. In short, the distribution of, and the terms of access to, public service media content has significant public interest implications which are the focus of this chapter.

Keywords: television, media platforms, critical infrastructure studies, access

Introduction

This chapter draws attention to the fundamental significance of distribution infrastructure through which content of all kinds is distributed and reaches us. An increasing number of public service media (PSM) organisations do not own or control all or key aspects of the distribution infrastructure. This renders them dependent on private commercial companies, mainly telecom giants, for the transmission, exchange, termination, the findability of and access to digital content. Traffic flows on platforms with considerable power, but these are largely unaccountable although significant to the foundations of economies, societies and politics. In the networked society, infrastructural matters have crucial importance. It is precisely this centrality that critical infrastructure studies aim to address.

For a long time, media studies have tended to focus on production, reception processes, and textual analyses of media content (Parks & Starosielski 2015). The

infrastructure that makes all of this possible has received surprisingly little attention because it has been largely seen as neutral and technical, and thus not a priority for media studies. Put differently, the emphasis has been on what is happening in front of the screen. As Star and Ruhleder (1996: 112-113) put it, the general perception is that an infrastructure “is built and maintained, and [...] then sinks into an invisible background”; it becomes visible only when it breaks.

This chapter provides a critical study of media infrastructures to 1) highlight their importance for the distribution of audiovisual traffic today and, in doing so, 2) raise awareness and encourage broader citizen-user interest and engagement in infrastructural matters regarding their development, regulation and use – what Parks and Stratolieski (2015: 6) refer to as “technological literacies” that are crucial for the content we can access, create, find, consume, and (re)use. This has a pivotal bearing on our empowerment to be informed citizens and participate in society under networked conditions. Indeed, as Sandvig (2015: 225) argues, focusing on infrastructure is “an essential task for those who hope to know and to change media and technology”. This chapter brings the distribution infrastructure of television from the background to the foreground and makes it a central focus of study of media, and PSM in particular.

Writing about the future of television in 2015, Michael Wolff concluded that “people will [continue] watching TV, even if they stop watching *the TV*” (2015: 28). Three points are worth highlighting. The first relates directly to the topic of this chapter. As a cultural form, television has so far preserved its central position in the media landscape and will continue to remain significant, enjoying high consumption rates despite the ‘digital revolution’. Second, television is arguably being challenged as a distribution technology. A core aim of this contribution is to precisely assess the challenges to distribution for television content in the networked society context.

The third point is that in many EU countries, original television content is essentially PSM content. Recently, the EBU analysed data from 15 European countries and concluded that in 13 of them PSM was spending significantly more on original content than their commercial counterparts and, crucially, 2.6 times more worldwide than Netflix and Amazon combined (Priestley 2017). Given the legal and general understanding that PSM is about content which is critical to the healthy functioning of democratic societies (e.g. for enhancing social cohesion, for enabling civic participation, and promoting cultural diversity precisely because of investment in original content), this means how we find that content and how it reaches us are crucially important questions. My aim in this chapter is to draw attention to the interdependence between content and distribution, and to call for more research on the pressures, challenges and opportunities concerning the distribution of and access to PSM content in the networked society (see also Michalis 2014).

I examine the BBC as our case and argue that distribution dilemmas are growing in the networked society environment. The BBC was chosen for three reasons. First, because Britain is a highly developed and competitive media market with many options to distribute and access content. This allows for an interesting discussion of

relevant issues. Second, as acknowledged in other studies (e.g. Van den Bulck et al. 2018), the BBC has often taken the lead in technological innovation. It is, in that sense, a ‘Bellwether case’. The third reason has to do with my expertise and the accessibility of relevant documents and professionals for research. Document analysis relied on relevant policy and consultation documents, industry reports and media coverage. The analysis also benefited from informal discussions with relevant professionals.

Admittedly, the BBC is unique. Despite financial, market and technological pressures, it remains a big and strong PSM provider, and its programmes sell well internationally via its commercial subsidiary, BBC Worldwide. I make no claim this case is representative of PSM everywhere. I agree with others, however, about the importance of detailed case studies to capture specifics and that is what the chapter offers (Humphreys 2012; Evens & Donders 2013; Lotz 2014). But although the second part of the chapter is country specific, the aim is to shed light on emerging and typical power relations between broadcasters and distributors, and in particular to emphasise this is not a simple linear power relationship. The first part of the chapter clarifies the main changes in the television landscape in the networked society. The broad conclusions should be relevant to other countries. The second section starts with critical analysis of the notion of a ‘networked society’. This is followed by discussion of the main changes in the media environment and the emerging television value chain, especially pointing to interdependencies and (new) power relations that have implications for PSM. I then examine the distribution strategy of the BBC to demonstrate the principles and dilemmas that shape it.

Infrastructure, platforms and networked society

We begin with three interrelated concepts that set the context for all that follows: infrastructure, platforms and networked society. In critical infrastructure studies an infrastructure is not viewed as a stand-alone, static or neutral technical system. Rather, an infrastructure is conceived as a dynamic socio-technical system (e.g. Star & Ruhleder 1996; Fuchs 2017). This is “fundamentally a relational concept” (Parks & Starosielski 2015: 9) that reflects existing knowledge, social structures and power relations, but at the same time is a critical factor shaping the production, circulation and consumption of information, knowledge and culture. Ultimately, different perspectives on infrastructure reflect competing visions of society. For Sandvig (2013), this relational understanding of infrastructure points to a variety of actors that, having diverse and often contradictory goals, are differentially positioned. The value chain approach considered in a later section sheds light on these relations and differential positions. My view is based on the perspective of critical infrastructure studies.

Sandvig (2015: 238-239) explains the transformation of the internet over the last 40 years. In his view, the transformation “from a textual system to an audiovisual one” was not a story of technological maturation but rather “the transformation was intentional”.

The aim was to “change the medium itself and optimize it for mass communication, providing a way to assemble large audiences” for profit, to increase advertising rates for video on the basis of vast amounts of user data (e.g. YouTube), and improve the possibility of introducing subscription fees (e.g. Netflix). In that light, I argue that what we are witnessing is a case of television (audiovisual content) disrupting the internet rather than the other way around.

In fact, there are more and very strong continuities than ruptures with the past. This reality is keyed to the intentional predominance of media organisations based on a commercial logic that works best if accompanied by massification. The core features of capitalism (notably capital accumulation, a generalised and expansionist proprietary market logic, and the profit motive) remain as dominant today as before the internet. We cannot therefore accurately pronounce the advent of a *new* type of society. At best, we can only speak about new qualities of capitalist society. The networked society notion interrogated in this volume is useful for the capacity to highlight important transformations that especially include the pervasiveness and spread of digital technologies, without implying that these herald a new type of society.

It is more enlightening to use notions that highlight rather than obfuscate continuities with the past, which are primarily notions that retain the noun ‘capitalism’ and apply adjectives to this that signal the significant changes brought about by information and communication technologies (ICT). What appears to many as a new type of society is, in simple terms, a ‘digital’ (Schiller 1999) or ‘platform’ (Srnicke 2017) intensification of capitalism. These adjectives draw attention to the latest main source of capital accumulation. In this chapter, as for the book overall, the ‘networked society’ is not viewed as a technological phenomenon with its own internal logic but rather understood in a broader socio-historic context. In this chapter, particularly, that context is capitalist society. It makes more sense, in this view, to talk about a ‘networked capitalist society’. This is the broad context for thinking about the distribution of PSM content. In the next section I examine the growing complexity of the value chain for television distribution in the internet age, and explain the often contradictory interests of participants.

Transformation in the television value chain

The key transformations in the field of television concern three areas that comprise the ‘value chain’ for the broadcasting sector: content creation and aggregation of services, distribution, and consumption. We deal with each of these in turn.

Creation of diverse content is the archetypal function of public service broadcasters in particular. The proliferation of television channels, with the expansion of cable and satellite transmission since the 1980s and the more recent move to digital television in the 2010s, has facilitated the entry of new broadcasters and independent producers in the market. The internet is the prime example of technological convergence because it blurs the boundaries between previously separate sectors for broadcasting, publish-

ing and telecommunications; it has also enlarged the digital market and intensified and internationalised competition. Broadcasters no longer compete just with other broadcasters. They are now competing with publishers and an increasing range of non-traditional media players, many of whom are financially powerful, have a nearly global footprint and are focused on global services, and enjoy access to granular data on users upon which they base their market strategy.

YouTube launched a streaming subscription service in 2015 in selected countries (wealthy markets) and is now investing in original productions as a complement to its vast ad-supported user-generated offer. Netflix and Amazon Prime operate along the lines of traditional pay-TV, buying premium content and investing in original content that targets a global market. These powerful technological giants cultivate big media ambitions as their corresponding platforms are increasingly like television. For Plantin et al. (2016: 2-3), such platforms have become so “ubiquitous and deeply embedded that [they] could be seen as an infrastructure: robust, widely shared, widely accessible, and essential”. The authors conclude that “[d]igital technologies have made possible a ‘platformization’ of infrastructure and an ‘infrastructuralization’ of platforms”. In short, the internet has expanded the television market and television has disrupted the internet, not the other way around.

Content is typically the largest operating cost for broadcasters, with PSM generally being the main investors in original productions in Europe. With competition rising, inflationary pressure on premium content is considerable, especially following the market entry of large international players. It is becoming harder for PSM to continue investing in original and distinctive content of particular relevance to their host societies, despite the fact that this is their *raison d'être*.

Following content creation, the next step in the TV value chain is to bundle content and offer it as a service. In the past, this was offered on a typical linear television channel. Increasingly today, bundles include not only traditional broadcast content but an array of other services. Commercial players have launched triple-play offers for television, broadband internet, and fixed voice telephony in one package (and mobile in the case of quad-play offers).¹ Such large bundles aim to lock-in customers. In this scenario, PSM must rely on third parties, often direct competitors, for the distribution of their content – on parties who wish to own, or at least control, the relationship with users. Pay-TV platforms such as Sky, device manufacturers like Apple, and platform controllers like Virgin, support closed proprietary technologies and assume a gatekeeping role because they pre-approve the content, services and applications that users can access (OECD 2013). The BBC recently voiced concerns about the growing power of new market players and the potential of their platforms to become ‘super-aggregators’ bringing content and services from across sources to one place, thereby adversely affecting industry revenue and, by extension, content creation (OC&C 2017).

Distribution is next in the value chain, the link between content and audiences (Beutler 2017). In the past, most (public service) broadcasters owned and operated

the dedicated distribution network for TV, typically terrestrial and later cable and satellite. There were a few exceptions, notably in Norway and Sweden, where PSB never directly owned the transmission network. Today, two main changes in distribution are worth noting. The first is the end of dedicated broadcast networks and the growth of other distribution infrastructures. Many (public service) broadcasters no longer own a broadcast network, which are today mainly owned by telecom companies. This can be understood as part of public service broadcasters' efforts to transform themselves into public service content providers (Bennett 2008). In practice, this change requires broadcasters to negotiate access to networks capable of delivering broadcast content, often upon payment, as for example the BBC pays Sky for satellite carriage.

The second change is the expansion of broadband connections and the potential of online delivery via the public internet (called over-the-top distribution, or OTT) or via a managed TV connection (IPTV). This becomes the fourth distribution platform alongside terrestrial, cable and satellite. The internet is heralding new business models and new ways of reaching audiences that require neither a broadcast signal or channel. Multiple delivery mechanisms, or infrastructure, have facilitated audience fragmentation with adverse impact on advertising-funded media. Perhaps more importantly, in the online media environment, audiences as users are freed from linear schedules and content packages. Individuals can actively seek and also create audio-visual content, and interact with it. Audiences are no longer constrained by passivity but can, if they choose, be active.

Wireless internet connections and the popularity of portable devices, mainly smartphones and tablets, mean audiences can increasingly personalise and control viewing. Television consumption is becoming non-linear, either time-shifted through a recording device like a personal video recorder or through video on demand (VOD). Broadcasters believe they have to follow their audiences and offer their content on whatever platforms and devices audiences prefer. Public services broadcasters are often obliged to do so. These changes in distribution are fundamental, as observed by the UK Office of Communications:

[A]s the ways in which content is distributed become more complex, and the number of firms involved in the production and distribution of content grows, it may be harder for PSBs to get access to some key platforms, or for them to get access in a manner which enables them to retain some degree of prominence and editorial control. (Ofcom 2015: 17).

The distribution of PSM content has significant public interest implications. It is not simply that the newer distribution platforms (cable, satellite, IP, mobile) have intermediaries and, unlike terrestrial broadcasting, carry the risk of rent-seeking gatekeepers, but, importantly, the new distribution platforms are typically commercial and interested in creating and exploiting artificial scarcities for financial benefit. As Martin explains, the digital ubiquity of newer technological platforms promise the potential

of expanding the reach of PSM and enabling participation on the one hand, but on the other hand, this entails greater reliance on corporate players. In short, it means “private control over public resources and communications”, deeper surveillance of citizens/users, and ultimately the further entanglement of PSM in the agendas of a few transnational technological giants and the structures of informational capitalism (Martin 2016: 7, 16).

The potential chokepoints for gatekeeping in the new TV value chain are, essentially, nodes of control that point to and indicate the market power a player has. Perhaps the most visible expression of power is in the findability of content. The critical question for PSM is how easy is it to find their content in the growing context of technological convergence, where commercial interest and algorithms essentially dictate what is findable and how easily, and where the onus is on the user to actively look for content and create her/his own schedule? This is a core question for consideration in and for a ‘network society’. The power and capacity to influence what can be found is not only about economic market power but, arguably more significantly, raises crucial questions about the practice of democracy. That is a core concern of Graham Murdock in the present volume, who calls for a public service search engine and public service algorithms.

As noted, it is increasingly unlikely that a single (public service) broadcaster will be responsible for and able to control both the content creation/ aggregation stage and the distribution elements of the television value chain in the future. It might be more accurate and analytically useful to use the notion of “value network”, as Virta and Lowe (2017) explain. This refinement of the chain concept aims precisely at analysing the broader environment in which a media company must operate in a complex assortment of relationships with other entities who might be but are not necessarily spatially proximate. How the relationships within, and ultimately beyond, the value network are managed is crucial for the network’s sustainability and efficiency.

What is relevant for our purposes is the relationship between a public service broadcaster, whose main activity is content creation and aggregation, and a distributor, whose main function is to serve as an infrastructure provider responsible for the delivery of the broadcaster’s content. Given the growing interest of distribution companies to produce their own content, the relationship can be characterised as ‘coopetitive’ (Virta & Lowe 2017: 4). Coopetition means the relationship between the broadcaster (as content creator) and the distributor (as infrastructure provider) is an interdependent one; it can be competitive where and when the infrastructure provider has moved up the value chain to offer original or bundled content of its own in direct competition with the broadcaster, but simultaneously co-operative because the broadcaster’s audio-visual content is one primary driver of infrastructure use and take-up, notably in demand for high bandwidth. We’ll come back to this later.

Our discussion in this section clarifies the context as a networked capitalist society and the main transformations in the television value chain. The next section considers continuities that remain significant in the British television environment.

Broad trends in the television market in the UK

One might get the impression that the changes discussed above have fundamentally altered all aspects of the television market. This is not so, at least in Britain – which is a major media market in Europe, and indeed worldwide. In this section I draw attention to three aspects that have largely remained the same.

First, and paradoxically, despite higher penetration of broadband, the rapid take-up of connected devices, and increased competition for audience attention, television viewing remains stubbornly healthy in Britain. Although the figures indicate continuous decline, on average people in Britain still watched 3 hours and 32 minutes per day in 2016 (Ofcom 2017). This hides significant variations among different viewer groups: Television among 16-24 year-olds has experienced the steepest decline (27 per cent) since 2010 followed by children (26 per cent). So, we don't want to minimise the decline, especially with regard to the next generation's media use patterns. But 3 hours and 32 minutes per day is not insignificant.

The three traditional digital television platforms are Freeview (terrestrial), Sky Digital (satellite) and Virgin Media (cable). These remain the primary means for accessing television content in the UK. Two of them (free-to-air Freeview and subscription-based Sky Digital) have polarised the market, with just over 40 per cent of households receiving television via DTT and 31 per cent of households via the pay satellite platform. The percentages have not increased since 2010 (Ofcom 2017: figure 2.37). This indicates that television consumption platforms and patterns are more resilient than market forecasts would lead us to believe.

However, the hold of the two traditional pay-TV platforms (cable and satellite) is likely to increase in the medium to long term, especially following the World Radio Communication decision in 2015 to squeeze the digital terrestrial TV spectrum to the sub-700 MHz UHF band to accommodate higher demands from the mobile industry (see Harvey 2016 for analysis). A weakened DTT platform will strengthen the role of content aggregators and pay-for proprietary platforms, resulting in powerful gatekeepers. It will also put at risk the considerable investment in original content by PSM, which is sustained by the DTT platform as the main distribution platform.

Second, the continued attraction of linear TV, both live or catch-up, is equally striking. Most viewing continues to be on linear channels, with adults on average watching three hours of live television (Ofcom 2017). Consumption of online content has grown very slowly. As of 2016, it stood at 20 per cent (Ofcom 2017). In other words, non-linear consumption is growing incrementally and in complementary fashion, not substituting for linear TV, and serves to increase the popularity and reach of traditional (PSM) content.

Third, and surprising in the context of PSM's diminishing budgets and growing competition, is the continued attraction of PSM output. Although it has decreased by 4 percentage points since 2010, just over half (51 per cent) of all TV viewing is on the five PSM channels in the UK (Ofcom 2017: figure 2.1). In addition, the main

PSM channels account for 37 per cent of all programme spend. This proportion is even more significant if one considers that it is pay-TV subscriptions (46 per cent of total TV industry revenue in 2016) that drive growth in total sector revenues (Ofcom 2017).

This section assessed characteristic trends in the British television market that demonstrate important continuities: television viewing remains healthy, linear TV is still strong, and PSM output remains attractive. The next section discusses the BBC's distribution dilemmas and strategy in the networked society context.

The BBC and dilemmas in distribution: Principles, partnerships and innovation

The BBC does not own a broadcast infrastructure, and thus relies on third party network owners and operators. Until 2015 there was no framework dealing specifically with the distribution of BBC content. Evidence in itself of the rising saliency of distribution issues in the networked society context, the BBC Trust adopted a 'Framework for Distribution' in 2015.² The BBC must balance changing audience preferences with investment in a variety of distribution platforms, strive to offer quality content and services on every platform where it has a presence, and provide a universal service despite a decreasing licence fee settlement and less radio spectrum.

The 2015 Distribution Framework consolidates existing principles and requirements for distribution of BBC content, and provides clarity to the industry when engaging with the organisation (BBC Trust 2015a). It sets out six principles: 1) universal access, free at the point of use, 2) value for money, 3) openness and transparency, 4) control over content distributed through third parties, 5) services and content should be easy to find, and 6) direct relationship with audiences. These distribution principles are clearly interrelated. The remaining of the section treats these principles in two categories, examining the first four together, and then the last two.

Universality, value for money, openness and transparency, and control over third party distribution are the first category. The BBC is available on many (though not all) platforms with overlapping footprints, and delivers content in a range of formats to more than 10,000 devices. This strategy is in line with traditional PSM principles the BBC must adhere to, notably promoting universality, responding to audiences' preferences, and driving the take-up of new technologies. The downside is the underlying cost the strategy entails, especially in the context of increased competition and decreasing revenue. The operational environment is complex (Figure 1).

Attuned with PSM values, a core response of the BBC has been firm support for free-to-air platforms that enable a horizontal market in consumer equipment and mitigate against powerful gatekeepers curtailing universal access. The BBC invested in Freeview (the terrestrial free-to-air platform), Freesat (the satellite FTA platform) and YouView (the IP-enabled TV platform), along with commercial industry partners

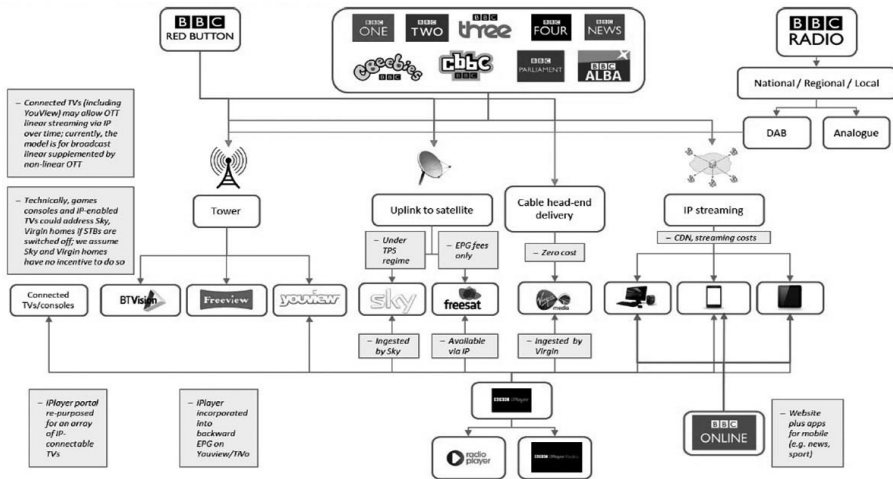


Figure 1. The BBC's distribution footprint, main platforms (2013)

Source: Mediatique (2013: 5)

that include Sky and British Telecom (BT). Such investment can be characterised as coopetitive, which the Trust endorses as a key strategic resource. This is interesting in the context of the networked society where distribution control is increasingly in the hands of commercial players. The BBC is supposed to be open to innovations from third-party platforms and device manufacturers as long as they promote the interests of audiences and are in line with the framework principles. This coopetitive response underlines the alignment of interests between the BBC, commercially-funded PSM, pay-TV platforms and other commercial players (especially broadband providers) in the face of common risks. At the same time, it “clearly illustrates the difference between commercial and public service practices” (Lotz forthcoming). Coopetition is also evident in content creation where co-productions have increased and expanded to news rather than only in drama and comedy (Oliver & Ohlbaum 2015).

The BBC has capped distribution and marketing costs at 10 per cent of licence fee income. According to Mediatique, in 2012–2013 the BBC spent 6.5 per cent on distribution (£233m). The biggest part (£203m) was spent on traditional infrastructures (radio, television and participation costs in Freeview and Freesat, and the industry stakeholder group Digital UK that operates the terrestrial transmission TV network). This is justified because the DTT and DSAT platforms deliver universality, covering 99.5 per cent of UK households (with 98.5 per cent for DTT). This will continue for the foreseeable future. The remaining £30m was spent on streaming and on-demand distribution (Mediatique 2013). Despite the lower spend, online distribution is a core element of the BBC's distribution strategy that poses dilemmas for universality, cost, and syndication.

The BBC has led innovation in UK online distribution, embracing online delivery via the open internet (OTT delivery) and devoting various applications for catch-up viewing – most notably the iPlayer that was launched in 2007 and remains the most popular on-demand and streaming service in the UK. Since 2013, the BBC has started to premier new content on the iPlayer.

Although online PSM viewing represents a small proportion of total viewing, the BBC believes younger audiences will rely increasingly on IP delivery. They do not expect IP to deliver more than 20 per cent of all video viewing by 2020, however. Ofcom has estimated that if online PSM viewing reaches 25 per cent by 2024, the costs for IP delivery could double, but the overall distribution costs could fall in nominal terms on the assumption that the ‘per stream’ cost of delivering video online will continue to decrease as volumes increase and the cost of DTT may fall (Ofcom 2015: 25). However, Ofcom also observes that if online PSM viewing were to increase significantly more by 2024, so that nearly half of viewing were to shift to online/IP platforms, then the opposite outcome is plausible and the total distribution costs could actually rise by around £100m (Ofcom 2015).

The cost for networked communications is unclear but has obvious importance for the future. This brings to mind several thoughts about the potential shift of viewing online and associated distribution costs. First, putting aside the uncertainty regarding changes in consumption patterns, the potential for significantly higher distribution costs as more viewing shifts to online/IP platforms appear to be in conflict with the government’s policy to ensure superfast broadband availability for 95 per cent of the population by 2017, which is necessary for the possibility of more video content being delivered over the internet. To this, one can add a likely decline of the DTT platform as a result of the (continued) reallocation of frequencies to mobile and broadband uses (Michalis 2016). Second, as for other PSM organisations (e.g. YLE Finland), the BBC has inaugurated an ‘internet first’ strategy and begun to premier new content online, especially programmes targeting younger people. An important related development was the March 2016 closing of BBC3 that targeted the 16-34 years old demographic as a conventional television channel. Now the service is only available as an online channel.

These developments and trends don’t add up. Given that online PSM content consumption is not very strong yet (even among younger audiences), why is it wise for PSM to transfer some content exclusively online where the costs of distribution are higher? Judging from the available data, online distribution for the iPlayer only delivered 2.3 per cent of total BBC viewing in 2012 (linear and non-linear; 600m hours) at a cost of just under 12 per cent of the total for all distribution. In sharp contrast, conventional distribution of PSB content delivered 98 per cent of the audience at 87 per cent of the cost. Put differently, for each percentage point of viewing share, the iPlayer (non-linear distribution) is six times more expensive than linear distribution (based on data from Mediatique 2013). One can easily conclude, as Mediatique did, that, from the vantage point of costs linear distribution provides much better ‘value for money’ for the BBC. Broader policies and trends (especially the push for faster

rollout of superfast broadband and the diminishing role of DTT) appear to be pushing PSM towards the costlier online/IP delivery method. If half of PSM viewing is to take place on online/IP platforms by 2024, then the associated distribution costs can be expected to rise dramatically. Given diminishing PSM budgets, that scenario will put at grave risk the public policy objectives associated with PSM in the UK.

Turning now to syndication, as for other PSM organisations the BBC is subject to ‘must offer’ obligations. Among the factors the BBC must take into account in deciding whether to make content available on a platform are editorial control, brand protection, no incremental cost to users, parental controls, and non-adjacency to adult material or advertising. For instance, the BBC agreed to put the iPlayer on the Sky On Demand platform only after securing editorial controls and access to user data. In contrast, the BBC refused to make BBC content available on the Sky mobile and tablet applications due to lack of editorial control, prominence and other mandated requirements (Mediatique 2013).

A final point relates to the limits of coopetition. It is interesting to note that PSM led the UK market in launching catch-up players and popularising on-demand consumption. These are well established and have continually developed their functionalities. The dilemma is whether this fragmentation, which makes sense for branding and control, is justified in the context of a networked society where audiences value convenience and the ability to find as much content as possible in a single place? Or, given the increasing threat of having commercial super-aggregators shaping audience preferences through non-transparent algorithms, whether co-operation among PSM organisations in the area of catch-up services and online distribution makes more sense? Indeed, the idea for an Open BBC where the corporation becomes a platform, an aggregator, a curator, and a gateway to the world for British creativity, open to partnership with, for instance, the country’s leading cultural institutions, provides a case in point (BBC 2015b). This dilemma leads nicely to a discussion of the last two BBC distribution principles.

Prominence, findability and relations with audiences

Content availability (universality) does not equal findability. How audiences discover content becomes increasingly important in the networked society where access is available via numerous devices and platforms. As Jackson reminds us, “if the contents and services provided by PSM can’t be found then they aren’t services and there is no public” (2016: 198). Indeed, distribution guidelines emphasise the continuing importance of prominence for BBC content so that audiences can easily and quickly find it. At the moment, Ofcom’s ‘Electronic Programme Guide’ code applies to linear channels and requires prominence for PSM there, but has no equivalent requirement of prominence for on-demand content. Responding to the consultation on the BBC’s distribution framework, commercial market players maintained there was no need

to extend this regulatory requirement to the online environment because commercial sense provided strong enough incentives to address that. They argued that since BBC content is popular and audiences wish to consume it, online firms have every interest to make it prominent on their services and platforms so that audiences can easily discover it (BBC Trust 2015b).

As noted earlier, however, the new technological giants in ‘new media’ have big media ambitions and are disproportionately powerful in financial terms. In the future, one could expect them to be in a position to pay for the prominence of their own applications and services in the online environment at the expense of competing PSM applications and services if negotiations and decision-making is left entirely to the market. It seems, therefore, that regulatory intervention aiming at promoting the prominence of British and PSM content is warranted to reduce the risk that commercial players will become the gatekeepers to such content.

The final dilemma that PSM faces concerns their relationship with audiences and the issue of personalisation, which is a central characteristic of the networked society. The paradox here is that the increasing complexity of the distribution environment makes this very challenging for PSM. The challenge hinges on the balance between personalisation and universality (see Van den Bulck & Moe 2017). The BBC expressed an interest in personalisation as early as 2004 (Ferne 2004). The 2015 Framework for Distribution perceives personalisation as complementary to universality and stresses “[t]he need for the BBC to have reasonable access to accurate and timely audience and user data available” (BBC Trust 2015b: 19). Access to user-data is expected to become critical as audience expectations for personalised services grow and the online giants have access to vast amounts of data they use to leverage commercial advantage.

If access to PSM is via third party providers (e.g. portals and OTT providers), those providers will enjoy the direct relationship with users and viewers rather than the content maker, with direct access to the resulting data. The recent ‘BBC+, The BBC, just for you’ application, launched in July 2016, aims precisely at offering a personalised service by providing users a single place where they can access all BBC content based on their consumption of BBC services (Hudson 2016). Since May 2017, the BBC has been prompting iPlayer users to create an account to get a “more personal and relevant” BBC experience through, for instance, programme recommendations, alerts, and allowing them to pick up a programme where they left off on another device (Scott 2017).

Conclusion

Building on critical infrastructure studies, this chapter brought the distribution infrastructure of television from the background to the foreground to make it central in the study of media, and PSM in particular. The social, civic, cultural and democratic role of PSM does not diminish in the networked society context, but actually strengthens.

However, the networked society and its accompanying complexity of media distribution present challenges for PSM that we have addressed as dilemmas for the fulfilment of the public service mission.

In critiquing the notion of a networked society, the chapter argues this does not herald the advent of a new type of society but, at best, new qualities of the capitalist society. Equally, when examining the core transformations in the television value chain, the persistence of continuities is strong in Britain. Still, it is clearly the case that in the networked society responsibility for the transmission, exchange and termination of digital content traffic increasingly lies with private commercial players who support technological solutions, markets and business models that favour commercial priorities and who, in many cases, are big platform owners that are powerful but largely unaccountable. This points to the supreme importance of infrastructure in economic, political, social, cultural and informational life. The potential for taking (strong) gate-keeping positions is real and presents risks for PSM, and for the fundamental values the enterprise supports: inclusiveness, freedom of speech and democracy.

The chapter sheds light on how PSM engages with these developments and rethinks the distribution of their content through examining the BBC. Their response has been three-pronged: developing a distribution framework, innovating, and establishing partnerships with other market players, including commercial firms. These responses present dilemmas, as explained, since the BBC has to carefully balance them against PSM principles. I have argued that regulatory intervention may be warranted either on straightforward competition grounds (e.g. abuse of market power and access to bottlenecks) or, as in the case of findability, because market solutions are likely to work at the expense of PSM and their associated public interest objectives.

All of this matters to the framework and realities of a network society because the distribution of PSM content has significant public interest implications. PSM is about content that is considered vital for the healthy functioning of democratic societies, enhancing social cohesion and promoting cultural diversity. How we find that content to achieve those purposes, and how it reaches us, are important issues. The ultimate aim of this chapter is to encourage broader citizen-user engagement with media infrastructural matters at local, national and international levels through, for instance, participation in policy debates, processes and campaigns, involvement in related civic society organizations, and support for non-profit public and community alternatives. The infrastructure of communications is neither neutral nor merely technical, but actually fundamental for the cultural and informational content that we access, create and consume. It matters to our potential for empowerment, active citizenship and, in short, for defining the society we live in. What is at stake is not simply about market power and fair competition, but crucially about voice, speech and democracy. The future of any networked society rests on our collective engagement with these issues.

Notes

1. The selling of (fixed) voice calls in today's advanced telecommunications markets may seem odd at first sight. Similar to other countries, in Britain voice calls are in decline. In particular, fixed-originated calls have experienced a large decline as they continue to be substituted by mobile-originated calls, internet-based voice and messaging services. Two paradoxes are worth noting. First, according to the latest available data, although fixed-originated voice call volumes were down by 11.9 per cent in 2016, in contrast with a 5.7 per cent increase in mobile-originated call volume, there has hardly been any change in the number of fixed lines that remain at around 33.5m. This is due to an increase in the number of households and, importantly, because in most cases landlines are required to access broadband services. Second, despite falling call volumes, the average revenue per fixed line increased due to continued increases in line rental prices and bundled calls. In other words, it is typically the case that fixed voice calls are sold as part of a bundle (Ofcom 2017).
2. Following the adoption of a new charter in April 2017, the BBC Trust was replaced by a unitary board. I refer here to the BBC Trust because it was responsible for the distribution strategy examined in this chapter. The 'Framework for Distribution' remains in place.

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Young Audiences and their Valuation of Public Service Media

A Case Study in Austria

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Abstract

Public service media is confronted with a decreasing usage among young audiences and a general decline in the use of linear programming. Even though young audiences have been socialised by linear media offerings and with public service media in particular, their media usage displays a mixture of old and new patterns and on-demand media repertoires. In an increasingly digitized and networked society the general valuation of public service media plays an important role to select and retain those media choices. This chapter explores young people's perceptions and valuation of public service media in Austria based on semi-structured qualitative interviews and on a quantitative online survey in an experimental design focussing on monetary valuation. The results suggest that it is a matter of more and clear information about the benefit of public service media when compared to private competitors. Trying to refrain from political and economic influences to ensure journalistic autonomy would improve the valuation of public service media for young audiences.

Keywords: public value, willingness to pay, ORF, media repertoires, youth and media

Introduction

Public service media (PSM) is supposed to provide content that has public value (Moore 2013) for every member of society (Martin & Lowe 2014). That is a key task more or less everywhere. Fulfilling this aim is increasingly complex, however, due to changing patterns of media use associated with advancing digitalisation that facilitates accelerating individualisation in media choices and growing audience fragmentation. Contemporary conditions make accomplishing this key task more difficult than in the broadcast era, both in terms of universal provision and reach. Growth in media choice encourages increasing demand, especially today for social media (Katz 1996; Bardoel & d'Haenens 2008a; Bjur et al. 2014).

General decline in the use of linear programming, the basis of PSB, is notably steep among younger people who are the biggest users of online content and services (IP Network 2016). For young audiences with an abundance of offerings online, selec-

tion is driven by personal evaluations of past performance and anticipation of finding personally appealing content (Gonser 2011). This has implications for the valuation of PSM. Do young audiences appreciate the idea and ideals of PSM? Would they pay money for PSM offerings? If not, what do they criticise and find lacking? This chapter addresses those questions with an empirical contribution to this area of scholarly debate. We address the book theme by specifically considering the ‘problem of youth audiences’ in their relations with PSM in a media environment that is characterised by abundant choice facilitated by networked media of communication.

Youth and media use today

Online media enables detailed measurement of use. Page visit rankings and counting clicks and likes are considered key success factors. This is evident in debate over principles and performance in PSM with an increasingly pervasive economic rationale that suggests lower amounts of use and weaker support from audiences. The value of PSM programming is uncertain in this environment – even when these institutions remain faithful to public service principles (Bardoel & d’Haenens 2008b ; Lowe 2016). Online media bring expansive offerings on varied platforms. Coping successfully with requires significant change in a transition from PSB to PSM, earlier stipulated as the ‘core challenge’ (Bardoel & Lowe 2009). Contemporary development in media systems is thought to entail a new social obligation for PSM to achieve innovation in efforts to reach audiences – particularly young people (BBC 2004; Elni 2008).

Online media distribution combines new and traditional sources and allows users to build individualised media repertoires (Taneja et al. 2012). A 2015 longitudinal study in Germany investigated media use among 14–29 year-olds and found that traditional media are less often used by those who prefer internet sources (Engel & Breunig 2015). A similar development has been observed in Austria where the use of internet media is high throughout the day, while linear media use follows a familiar pattern: radio in the mornings and TV during ‘prime time’ in the evenings. In fact, this pattern is generalisable throughout Europe and across generations. Internet penetration in Austria is 83 per cent, on par with the European average (e.g. Media Server 2014/15). The extensive usage of mobile and online networks similarly mirrors other European countries. Key findings in the *2017 Reuters Digital News Annual Report* indicates parallels across the EU that match patterns in Austria (Reuters 2017). All of this suggests the Austrian situation is an appropriate case for analysis of what is likely to be more generalisable regarding the valuation of PSM by young people. This chapter reports findings from a study that has done that.

Research suggests that young people in Europe have been socialised by linear media use and experiences with PSM (Süss 2004). This implies adherence to valuations and patterns of use learnt through adolescence. It has long been understood that PSM has educational and modelling functions that have a bearing on future

media use and perceptions. What is new and especially important in the context of an emerging networked society is the growth of interaction via social media platforms where the influence of peers affects media socialisation and choices – with long-term consequences (Friedrichs & Sander 2010).

Uses-and-gratification theory indicates that satisfaction of various needs by particular media influences future use (Katz et al. 1973). Evidence also suggests that ‘temporary routines’ can become durable (Naab 2012), and that personal media repertoires are often the result of an image or ‘schemata’ that is evident in recognition patterns (Marewski et al. 2009). All of this suggests that how young people use media today has consequences for their future patterns of use, with important implications for PSM.

This is why young audiences have been such a pressing concern for the institutional future of PSM. Research suggests that young audiences are less likely to support public expenditure to subsidise online content (e.g. Kammer et al. 2014). Linked to this, people’s willingness to pay (WTP) for media offerings is declining more or less everywhere (Klimmt et al. 2006; Schlegel 2011), which must have a bearing on contemporary discontent with mandatory financial contributions to fund PSM. This trend has strengthened with the growth of networked communications (Levy 2005). The proliferation of digital media channels provide a growing amount of cost-free content. Older generations value this too, but often still pay for various media offerings due to their habitual use in daily routines – especially evident in newspaper subscriptions. Younger generations do not and are permeated with a ‘free lunch’ mentality from early childhood (Sjurts 2002).

The ‘public value’ concept has been useful for discussion and analyses of PSM in competitive media markets (Lowe & Martin 2014). This discussion can be categorised as having two major dimensions. First, there are needs keyed to the individual value of services for each user who rates and estimates PSM’s importance in personal terms. Second, PSM also serves important societal needs and citizen perceptions play an important part in determining the value of PSM. Ideally, a summative valuation of PSM will include both dimensions (Gonser & Gundlach 2016). The degree to which this is true has a decisive bearing on the legitimacy of license fee financing for PSM (Jäckel 2003).

Despite their obvious importance to the future of PSM, young people’s perceptions and valuation of PSM have been insufficiently studied. Most of what has been done are quantitative surveys about media equipment and use (Hasebrink 2014; Engel & Breunig 2015; MPFS 2016; Ofcom 2016a, 2016b), which indicate that traditional and online news platforms are complementary in use among young audiences (Van Cauwenberge 2010). Previous studies rarely examined attitudes towards media in much detail, which is needed because of its essential importance to the future of PSM (Vanhaeght & Donders 2016). Scientific investigation of people’s evaluations and expectations for PSM is limited across all age groups, and a pressing need today (Gonser 2011; Paulussen et al. 2016). To develop a useful picture of the complex and

dynamic contours of PSM's personal and social value, as well as its monetary value (WTP), a broader perspective is required (Jørgensen & Rutgers 2015).

The concrete drivers for supporting or rejecting PSM offerings among young audiences across types of media are inseparably linked to all these factors because we are dealing with a rapidly changing media ecology that is more highly and intensively networked but also more fragmented. This environment is conditioned by media use experiences that, in turn, condition future patterns of media use. This dynamic experience grounds perceptions of value for all media offerings and brands.

The Austrian media landscape

We don't want to stretch the point, but we believe the Austrian case is useful for developing a more general understanding of challenges facing PSM regarding youth audiences in today – that the case is at least reasonably generalisable to Europe. But it is important to sketch the historical and social circumstances for PSM in Austria to also acknowledge what is unique. This pertains mainly to the national public service broadcaster in Austria, ORF (Österreichischer Rundfunk).

Hallin and Mancini (2004) categorise the Austrian media system as a case of the 'democratic corporatist model' they consider characteristic of the approach in northern Europe. Austria is a small EU member state with approximately 8.6 million inhabitants (Statistik Austria 2015) and is frequently suggested as a suitable case for examining 'small state problems' due to its large state neighbour (Germany), which is very influential due to a common language and similar culture. German media have considerable impact on domestic media and cause highly competitive conditions (Puppis 2009; Künzler et al. 2011). Both of the German PSM providers, ARD and ZDF, as well as the many private commercial channels in Germany, are popular among Austrians and part of most people's media repertoires. But ORF has so far maintained a strong position in the home market. The main TV channel (ORF eins) and at least one ORF radio channel (Ö3) have leading positions in daily reach (ORF Medienforschung n.d. a, b).

Austria is somewhat unique because digitalisation evolved slowly. ORF has launched services to facilitate time- and place-shifting. Television and radio offer I-player services via ORF-TVthek and archive functions that have gained popularity (ORF 2016). ORF also operates orf.at, a popular news website. More than half the Austrian internet population visits ORF's web services at least once a month (56.8 per cent), and the orf.at network is the most accessed online platform nationwide (ORF Medienforschung n.d. c). ORF also provides a short newscast called 'ZIB 100' designed for quick updates on mobile devices (each episode lasts 100 seconds). Reach has climbed to 60,000 users a day. The average age of users is 26 (Presse 2016). Other efforts to enhance digital engagement have been intentionally restricted, as in Germany (VFGH 2013).

Despite the wide range of ORF products and its strong position in the Austrian market, there are frequent allegations of too much political influence within the organisation. The governance of ORF involves a proportionate representation of political parties in each successive government. Overall governance is entrusted to the ORF Board of Trustees, which recently reappointed the Director General Alexander Wrabetz, a Social Democrat who competed for the post against a candidate favoured by the Conservatives. The strategy Wrabetz has proposed for the next four years of ORF operations and development focuses on producing innovations that appeal especially to young audiences between 14 and 29 years of age (Wrabetz 2016).

ORF has a mixed funding system, but license fees are the most important source of revenue. Every person owning a broadcasting receiver of any kind is obliged to pay the license fee. But this levy is not automatically charged per household as in Germany, and those who choose to confine use of ORF services to computer access (streaming) can do so free of charge (GIS 2017). In 2015, fee revenue was twice the amount derived from advertising (ORF n.d. b). On average, a full TV and radio license in Austria cost €282 EUR in 2014, while the EBU average was €135 EUR (EBU MIS 2015). Students, the unemployed or people with the right to social benefits are exempt from paying the license fees.

Methodology

Our empirical research was conducted in two parts in the ‘Public Value Goes International’ research project.¹ The research focus is on the valuation, expectation and individual use of PSM online contents and services by Austrians, with an open, unrestricted approach in qualitative interviews (‘Part one’) combined with a tight measure of monetary support for PSM that distinguishes between online and linear offerings (‘Part two’). Although the study was about the population in broad terms, in this chapter we focus on findings related to young audiences.

Part one: Personal and social value of public service media

Part one of our research relied on semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted in winter 2014 and spring 2015 after preparatory training for the interviewers (Irvine et al. 2013). Austrian respondents were selected via a ‘snowball’ sampling method to gather a diverse population. There was a rough ex ante consideration of demographic variables that include gender, educational achievement and age-group. Interviewees between 18 and 30 years of age comprise our sample of young audiences (N=50). Coding and management of the transliterated interviews was performed with Atlas.ti software (Friesen 2014). To protect confidentiality, the names in Table 1 were produced by a random generator. This was not an equalised sample, but gender and age

groupings are adequately balanced. The majority of participants had high educational levels, however, which is an important limitation.

Three categories for further analysis were first established and are indicated in Table 1. The largest group of young people appreciates the offerings from ORF and favours the principle of PSM. We categorised this group as ‘PSM-valuers’ (N=24), amounting to about half of the sample. The second group did not care as much about this or recognise important differences in either quality or programming when comparing ORF with private channels. We categorised this group as ‘PSM-neutrals’ (N=18). The third group was the smallest. They emphasised not valuing offerings from ORF and did not support the idea of PSM. We categorised this group as ‘PSM-non-valuers’ (N=8). Thus, the first thing to note is the strong general level of support for PSM in use and perceptions among young people in Austria.

Table 1. Sample of Austrian young audiences in a qualitative research design (N=50)

Female				Male			
		Educational level				Educational level	
Age	Low	Average	High	Age	Low	Average	High
18-21	Jaqueline	Claudia		18-21	Robert	Florian	
	Leonie	Sarah			Kevin	Jürgen	
	Jessika	Diana			Marcel	Markus	
	Tara	Tanja				Jonas	
22-25	Stefanie	Karin	Anna	22-25	Martin	Maximilian	Peter
		Angelika	Sabrina		Dominik	Christian	Philipp
			Birgit			Ralf	Alexander
			Lena			Felix	Patrick
			Andrea				Stefan
			Maria				
			Sophie				
26-30	Nina	Amelie	Julia	26-30	Andreas	David	Thomas
	Monika	Vanessa	Alexandra			Lukas	Sebastian
	Cornelia						Jan
							Erich
PSM-valuers				PSM-neutrals		PSM-non-valuers	

Comments: Low educational level = minimum compulsory schooling or vocational schooling, average educational level = vocational schools with higher education entrance qualification or academic high school, high educational level = academic degree from a university. The anonymised names were randomly generated.

Distinguishing between the three groups was possible due to a question directly asked in the interviews about whether each person recognises any differences between ORF and private channels, and whether those differences are important to her or him. This does not mean the interviewed person was current user of ORF, but all participants knew of a variety of offerings from public and private media.

PSM-valuers responded affirmatively and were, in most instances, frequent users of ORF services. For example, Philipp (m/22/high) said, “Public service media is im-

portant for me". In comparison, Tanja (f/21/average) is an example of PSM-neutrals; she couldn't think of any differences and said, "No, it does not matter at all. There is manipulation in public service media as well as in private media". Lukas (m/27/average) is representative of PSM-non-valuers who are in most instances neither valuing nor using PSM. He said, "if I think of the internet and the networks and the forums etcetera, then public service media is in the end not necessary anymore". We discuss detailed findings after the next section, which explains the second part of our empirical framework.

Part two: Monetary value of public service media

The second part of our study is based on a non-representative quantitative online survey in an experimental design conducted in June and July 2016. For the targeted group of young audiences, a total of 722 completed questionnaires were analysed (Table 2). The invitation to participate was distributed to students and graduates of the FHWien University of Applied Sciences in Vienna on internal message boards, e-mail notifications, and social media. Additionally, journalism students in a methods class recruited participants with the additional requirement not only to ask fellow students but also to invite people outside the university. Thus, we did not use a simple random sample, which limits generalisability, but the total who completed questionnaires is comparatively high and the student body includes young people from across Austria.

Table 2. Sample of Austrian young audience in quantitative online survey (n=722)

Age		Educational level			Total
		Low	Average	High	
18-21	female	6	141	6	153
	male	5	57	3	65
22-25	female	0	125	86	211
	male	0	62	30	92
26-30	female	0	28	96	124
	male	1	26	50	77
Total	female	6	294	188	488
	male	6	145	83	234
Total		12	439	271	722

The average age of respondents was 24 and 68 per cent of the sample was female. That is a high percentage, also indicating the non-random sample. Respondents of the lowest educational level are underrepresented, although about 60 per cent have an average level of education and about 38 per cent hold an academic title, i.e. already graduated with at least one degree. The survey was created and processed using Unipark/

Questback software and distributed with a non-personalised link. The questionnaire contained several sections dealing with media use, views towards PSM and commercial media, and WTP for PSM. The section on media views included questions about satisfaction with PSM, degrees of trust in various media brands in general and the evening news in particular, and attitudes about license fees and routine media expenses.

To test how lack of knowledge or awareness of PSM online services might affect the WTP, we used an experimental design to present segments of the sample with a stimulus adapted from earlier surveys with a similar focus (Fauth et al. 2006; Schlegel & Seufert 2012; Schlegel 2014). Two PSM stimuli were displayed to respective groups: one featuring traditional TV and radio broadcasts presented to sample group 1, and a second featuring online services shown to sample group 2 (Figure 1). No stimulus was offered for a control group. Both stimuli contained a PSM brand logo, symbols referring to broadcast or online content, and a short statement about how license fees contribute to sustaining the services represented.



Figure 1. WTP stimuli for sample groups 1 (TV- and radio stimulus) and 2 (online-stimulus)²

After exposure, participants responded to the WTP question. Following Delaney and O'Toole (2004), as well as Schlegel and Seufert (2012), a subscription scenario was chosen as the context for the WTP elicitation, which was measured using a 'payment ladder' (Bateman et al. 2002). This required the respondent to 'climb up' from EUR 0 to the maximum price they would be willing to pay for a subscription. In our sample, the mean was only EUR 8.70. The average that young audiences would pay for ORF's offerings was actually higher in the group without a stimulus (mean = EUR 8.79; see Table 3). Thus, even without a significant difference between groups, we interpret this to mean that the sensitisation did not increase the WTP and actually seems to have provoked a lower average WTP. The same effect appears for the online offerings of ORF.

Analysis: Parallels between the two parts on the valuation of public service media

Our results on the WTP test suggest the problem for PSM and young audiences is not lacking information about offerings, but rather a matter of whether the perceived relevance and monetary value are questionable. Even when PSM is valued, the average monetary value is low. We also found higher support among young people for the idea of PSM than the actual offerings of ORF. That suggests ORF as a specific provider does not meet the expectations of young audiences overall – even for those that use their services. The most radical interpretation might be taken as an indication of a general reluctance to pay for any media service of any type.

Table 3. Mean values of WTP for Austrian young audiences

Experimental groups	Mean	N	Standard deviation
TV- and radio-stimulus	EUR 8.52	225	7,161
Online-stimulus	EUR 8.77	256	7,376
No stimulus	EUR 8.79	235	6,911
Total	EUR 8.70	716	7,150

It is important to observe, however, that there are many valuers of PSM among young people in Austria. PSM-valuers actively use ORF and specify the advantages of PSM in principle and in referring to ORF as a predominantly good example. Florian (m/19/average) used orf.at and said, “especially ORF is, in my opinion, very professional and keeps you up to date”. PSM-valuers were heavy users of ORF’s online offerings. At the same time, they want more provision of appropriate content for younger people, although Florian thought it necessary for PSM to be “boring” and to leave out “the drama where there is no drama [because] the ORF is not profit-oriented and concentrates on provision of information”. When asked where she would expect to find trustworthy information, Lena (w/25/high) answered, “Public service media. And I would never ever search for information in some of those internet forums”. In comparison to other PSM providers, Philipp (m/22/high) saw development potential for ORF, “because there is an ample scope above it. If one takes for example the BBC or the German public service media, the ORF is just fair to middling”. PSM-valuers are convinced of the idea of PSM and mainly satisfied with the content provided by ORF, despite criticisms of performance and compared with PSM providers outside Austria.

PSM-neutrals are generally also users of ORF offerings and mostly evaluate them favourably. Markus (m/21/average) liked to “read the ORF News. They are very short and so on”. Karin (w/22/average) thought, “the majority of people are pleased with the media offerings [of ORF]”. Still, Felix (m/22/average) did not see any personal benefits in using ORF offerings and explained his general attitude: “I do not see a huge difference between ORFeins and ProSieben. There are American TV serials all

day long on both channels". Andreas (m/29/low) agreed, "in my opinion ORF shows too much entertainment and less education". Political influence was only mentioned by one participant and the overall image of ORF seems vague, although quite positive overall. There were some recommendations for improving ORF online content. Nina (w/28/low) preferred it when "everything is compact and concrete. I would recommend it [orf.at]". Nonetheless, the concrete distinctions between ORF and private providers could not be nailed down by this group.

PSM-non-valuers are predominantly non-users of ORF offerings and see the main disadvantage of ORF in assumed political influence in the selection of news coverage, and in managing the company. Moreover, perceptions of outdated offerings and ORF having commercial priorities were predominant drivers for refraining from use. Sophie (f/22/high) was sceptical because, "the board of trustees of ORF is politically staffed and one may conclude that because of that, certain political issues are reported in ORF and certain other issues are not". Although there were users of orf.at in this group too, regular or routine consumption was rare. As David (m/26/average) explained, "it only unnerves me. It looks like they have been stuck in the Stone Age". Another criticism was a perceived lack of range in ORF offerings. Vanessa (f/30/high) was disappointed and said, "ORF also just wants to make money. [...] some political backgrounds are important but economic reasons as well". In sum, for this group ORF is not much used and more distrusted due to perceptions that it is politically influenced, old-fashioned, and too focused on economic drivers.

Referring to the general level of monetary contribution for ORF's online offerings, commitment is very low across the youth population. The average amount young audiences are willing to pay for PSM was only €8.70 EUR per month, about one-third of the current license fee for them. Given our results, this is not caused by lack of information about ORF online offerings. Comparing the low WTP with comments from our qualitative survey, two main reasons for reluctance to pay become obvious.

First, low WTP is rooted in a general tendency to criticise economic competition in ORF, confounded by obligatory license fees. Commercial advertising provides additional income, but is not an acceptable option even among PSM-valuers. Ralf (m/25/average) criticised this: "ORF collects license fees and still there are commercials as well". PSM-neutrals do not appreciate license fees because, as Andreas (m/29/low) complained, "I do not know what they are doing with the license fees" and, he added, "They should invest in high quality documentaries rather than in entertainment". PSM-non-valuers argued there is too much political influence, not enough plurality of opinions, and injustice because of obligatory license fees that must be paid even by individuals who don't use ORF services. Vanessa (f/30/average) was clearly disappointed and said, "I have expectations of public service media. But they are not accomplished because they are too dependent".

Second, participants described online offerings from private competitors as an enrichment of options and a preferable possibility for generating plurality of perspectives. Angelika (f/25/average) saw a benefit in using private offerings and explained, "if

there is just PSM, only one single opinion is forced and influenced by the state. Private providers have the chance to come up with their own beliefs and spread them. They have another point of view”. Alarming, PSM-non-valuers tend not to take any PSM offer into account because they have not found interesting content earlier and therefore anticipate more of the same. David (m/26/average) did not see a benefit for himself and commented, “the price-performance ratio is not fair – I do not get anything; I do not even use ORF”. For PSM-non-valuers, the wish for political independence is most obvious and the lack thereof is the main reason for being sceptical of PSM. Besides this, there is no disposition to support the idea of PSM as a way to create social value because that is not considered possible given the prevailing circumstances of PSM with regard to political influence.

Discussion

Combining the results of individual and social valuations with the monetary valuation of PSM, a general picture emerges. To start with the good news: young audiences in Austria are aware of the various PSM offerings, are still using them (especially for news consumption), and generally appreciate the idea of PSM. But this result is probably overestimated as a result of low news consumption among young people and an overcritical evaluation of media offerings they don’t even use (Prior 2009). Nonetheless, strong criticism of political and economic influences is pronounced among this population, and seen as highly problematic no matter whether the interviewees favour PSM in principle or not. However, there is suspected manipulation of content not only in PSM but also from private providers due to commercial motives. In that sense, young people are sceptical about commercial motives in media and especially sceptical about commercial PSM. The interviews also suggest that young people do not discern much difference between PSM and private providers.

Our findings demonstrate that there is a relationship between usage and valuation – finding relevant content conditions media routines and a personalised media repertoire (Napoli 2011). Nonetheless, refusal of PSM offerings in principle, and no matter on which platform, is a serious problem for the future of PSM. Although the specific national media background of Austria has to be taken into account, general interpretations can be inferred from empirically observed tendencies and coherences and the overall similarity of patterns in Austria compared with Europe more broadly, as discussed earlier.

The main results

We structure the main results in three sections: public value, transparency and economic dependence. The most pressing need for PSM is not lack of information about their offerings, since all participants in our survey knew about ORF offerings even though they were not all current users. PSM-non-valuers in our survey are unlikely

to use linear PSM offerings but may turn to online offerings. The problem is that they might not even recognise they are using PSM content. There is, however, a lack of clarity about personal benefits and no sufficiently persuasive reason to use PSM offerings on the new platform. Alarming, even among PSM-valuers the meaning of public value and knowledge about legal requirements for ORF were shallow. There are annual reports provided online by ORF, but general knowledge about that, or even the basic idea of PSM with its complex social functions and relevance, is quite low. Transparency about political influence and journalistic autonomy is another area where more information and clarification should improve the image of PSM. Correspondingly, the use and reinvestment of license fee revenue was important for PSM-neutrals and PSM-non-valuers. This suggests the need to emphasise the social and individual rewards and explain how the money is spent, and why. Our results can be interpreted to imply a general scepticism about media that is keyed to suspected manipulation of content for political and commercial reasons. The obligation to pay for PSM offerings that are reportedly unused provokes incomprehension among young people. PSM-valuers are more likely to find license fees acceptable since they are usually PSM users. It was therefore evaluated as a justifiable contribution and an acceptable investment, but the actual amount this is worth was quite low.

Finally, for the young audiences we observed there was a general opposition to financing PSM by both license fees and commercial advertising. The mixture of income streams accounts for elevated scepticism concerning political interference on the one hand and undue economic influence on the other. PSM-neutrals and PSM-non-valuers were especially bothered and focused on the importance of avoiding economic dependencies all together. In fact, this was a critical issue even for PSM-valuers, and therefore poses a fundamental question for PSM. It merits a comprehensive rethinking.

As a whole, our results suggest that young audiences must be taken seriously by PSM providers for their long-term future. It is necessary to craft and communicate a clear message (i.e. rationale) for the relevance of PSM that is relevant to the next generation of potential users – or, otherwise, non-users. Which of the two an individual is likely to become has much to do with whether they value PSM in principle and in performance (both). More should be done to communicate the benefits of PSM in online platforms because so many young audiences prefer them.

Finally, to enhance the image of PSM among young people there is need to reduce political and commercial influences as the best way to guarantee high independence as an institution and in news coverage. Work is also needed to ensure clear distinctions between PSM and commercial providers. In an increasingly networked society this must be done especially on platforms that are used by young people. Failing this, there doesn't seem to be a good enough reason for using the services or paying the fees. Even worse, there is not obvious cause for supporting even the general idea of PSM as any necessity for the future.

Notes

1. The project 'Public Value goes international' (2014-2016) brings together PSM researchers from Austria, Belgium, Finland and Germany to collaborate on audience- and content-related issues in several European countries. It receives funding by Vienna Municipal Department 23 for Economic Affairs, Labour and Statistics (MA23). For further information: www.journalismusreinull.at/en.
2. TV- and Radio Stimulus: "Every day, millions of people watch or listen to the TV and radio programs provided by the ORF. These are financed through license fees and advertising." Online-Stimulus: "Every day, millions of people use the ORF's services on the Internet. These are financed through license fees and advertising."

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Networking Citizens

Public Service Media and Audience Activism in Europe

Christine Horz

Abstract

This chapter investigates public service media ‘challengers’, understood as audience activists who support and critique public service media. The research looks at selected European countries. Challenger initiatives represent a broad spectrum from individual opinions and informal initiatives to well-informed, organised groups. Public service media challengers aim to promote public debate about public service media issues and influence governance. This chapter introduces and operationalises the public service media challenger concept, drawing on document analysis, desk research and four semi-structured interviews with activists. Although the results are not generalisable, the research found two main types of highly-active networking groups that matter to the future of public service media in a networked society. One group are well-informed and organised public service media challengers who favour strong public service media and enunciate concrete recommendations. The other are civil society activists who are primarily concerned about public values and consumer-oriented issues, prone to be instrumentalised by neoliberal and populist interests.

Keywords: public service broadcasting, public service media, participation, civil society, media governance, viewers’ associations

Introduction

In networked societies, public service media (PSM) must adapt to major demographic and technological shifts. Young people’s internet affinity, as well as digitisation and convergence, are forcing PSM not only to adapt content but also to translate public service values for better alignment with the internet era. Otherwise, PSM will fail to fulfil its democratic role (Lowe 2008a; High-Level Group 2013; EBU 2014). A key adaptation involves building and consolidating partnerships with pluralistic audiences in order to ensure a diverse, functional and sustainable media system (Bardoel & d’Haenens 2004, 2008; Jakubowicz, 2008). Media users are confronted with a multiplicity of media providers. Content is no longer inherently congruent with quality and plurality (Infratest 2017) – if it ever was. The Web 2.0 facilitates more participatory forms

of media usage, but demands a willingness from media institutions to constructively shape public debate and build networks with ‘producers’ (Jenkins 2006).

Readiness to engage in dialogue with its publics and facilitate content co-creation will be crucial for addressing young people, especially. In a multi-stakeholder approach, building partnerships with cultural and educational institutions would enable PSM to develop public value through audience collaboration (Raats et al. 2013). However, this chapter assumes that content co-creation and audience collaboration alone will not be sufficient to meet current requirements. PSM institutions must facilitate audience participation on multiple levels, including governance. Here, governance is an analytical term that reflects networked decision-making processes between state and non-state actors, regulated and self-regulation respectively. At the same time audiences must perceive themselves to be stakeholders and act as such – not simply consumers of PSM. This is needed to develop a “culture of common responsibility” (Jarren 2007)

The challenger phenomenon is facilitated by networked communications and online media and can be seen as a key feature of networked societies (Castells 2005). This chapter conceptualises the idea of ‘PSM challengers’ by scrutinising activists aiming to promote public debate about these institutions, or to influence PSM governance – or both. This analysis requires mapping existing activist initiatives in Europe to identify the main goals, public communication methods and networks. The author assumes a wide range of opinions about, and activities relevant to, public sector institutions, in this case PSM, among European audiences that have yet to be explored and merits study given growing demands for discursive opportunities and public participation (Schweigert et al. 2011).

The chapter demonstrates how activists position themselves in relation to PSM *outside* institutionalised structures by focusing on media governance, content and social dimensions. It provides a theoretical overview of a proposed ‘PSM Challengers Model’ and describes the operationalisation and methodology that grounds it before reporting on empirical insights on audience activism initiatives in selected European countries. These initiatives are systematically reviewed on the basis of objectives, methods and networks, with a specific focus on networked communications.

Public service media challengers

Citizens have a key role to play in modern communication networks because of “the interaction between the new technological paradigm and social organisation at large” (Castells & Cardoso 2005: 3). Every participant in a networked society is a node, theoretically able to influence others, while anyone who refuses to participate is a “non-entity” (ibid: 14). The networked society “decentralize[s] performance along a network of autonomous components”, empowering actors outside the state or business communities to influence public affairs (ibid: 7).

The PSM challengers concept amplifies the notion of ‘cultural challengers’ keyed to Efrat Daskal’s (2016) study of the cultural dimensions of media complaints. Daskal

analysed audience dialogue with SATR, the Israeli regulatory body for broadcasting media, about the content of entertaining TV shows and found audience activism takes the form of complaints on four dimensions: moral, political, aesthetic and realist-rational. The latter targets “misleading presentation on factual information” (ibid: 788). The ‘challenger’ idea is used here for examining dimensions that activists target for demanding *structural* participation in PSM – audience engagement with, scrutiny of and influence on PSM as institutions and as a system.

While PSM mandates for audience participation and participatory opportunities are debated (Livingstone & Lunt 2011; EBU 2014), the claim that PSM wants to foster partnerships with the public is still rather rhetorical (Lowe 2008b). As Livingstone and Lunt (2011) demonstrated, the ‘implied audience’ in strategic goals and media regulations prioritise customer identity even for PSM. This is striking because PSM mandates and their ‘intrinsic values’ suggest that audiences *should* be treated as stakeholders and the public is their core stakeholder (Lowe 2016).

The Council of Europe (2012) proposed a three-tier model to promote public values and partnerships in PSM: 1) *structure* of media governance (independence and accountability), 2) *management* of PSM, and 3) *cultures* of governance, meaning transparency, openness, responsiveness and responsibility. Public access to information is a prerequisite for participation in democratic societies, so PSM must be careful about treating users as consumers rather than citizens and failing to support democratic activity in their own institutions (Collins & Sujon 2007). Normative assumptions about audience participation in media governance concentrate on the user-as-citizen narrative (Webster & Phalen 1994; Hasebrink 2011), and advocate audience demands to have a say and be part of decision-making (Puppis et al. 2007).

Although rare, empirical studies on audience participation in media governance contest normative approaches. A 2004 study from the European Association for Consumers of Television (EACTV) adopted a broad definition of participation, including informal audience-led initiatives and institutionalised representation in broadcasting councils, and did not discriminate between commercial and public service broadcasting (Eilders et al. 2006). While identifying an astonishing variety of participatory methods and models, decision-making participation is rare outside formal structures (e.g. councils). Moreover, users who demand for participation via Web 2.0 are rare (Eilders 2011).

However, small but important audience groups are interested to be involved in decision-making, despite the complexity of PSM governance. A recent online-consultation about the broadcasting law for WDR, the largest federal broadcaster in Germany, produced over 1,100 comments on 19 questions (Land NRW 2015), and more than 140 persons submitted elaborated proposals for two publicly announced seats in the WDR broadcasting council (WDR Rundfunkrat 2016).

Despite Hasebrink’s (2011: 329) assertion that users-as-citizens are “typical civil society actors”, the user-as-citizen concept remains abstract. Aslama-Horowitz (2010) found that different users have distinct interests, engaging with different media for-

mats, institutions and content. Moreover, the concept lacks solid political grounding because individuals (users) are less able to voice concerns and be heard than collectives (audiences). The main goal of activists is to achieve impact on “opinion, legislation, government policies, or corporate behaviour” (Dahlgren 2011). According to Carpentier (2015), however, the term ‘participation’ is often used in a minimalist way, for example to describe interaction that is fully under the control of producers, as in scripted ‘reality’ shows. It is synonymously used for access *to* media and interaction with others *by* media, rather than co-deciding in and about the media institution. In his view, this logic “leads to a homogenization of the audience and a disconnection of their participatory activities from other societal fields and from the broad definition of the political, resulting in the articulation of media participation as non-political” (ibid: 18). Carpentier advocated “equalized power positions of privileged and non-privileged actors in particular decision-making processes” (ibid: 20).

To define civil society in the PSM context is not easy, as most representatives in broadcasting councils represent civil society organisations that are privileged, when compared to stakeholder initiatives *outside* these decision-making bodies. As observed by Klein (2008), civil society interests advocate social values such as solidarity and democracy that are distinct from the self-interested motives of power (state) or profit, and link the political periphery with the centre (Habermas 1992). For civil society today, networked communication is essential because activists typically lack resources and may have low levels of organisation.

The impact of civil society at the level of (multi-)stakeholder initiatives often suffers from low public exposure, although this may increase during crises when the political centre needs to renew legitimacy. One example is the current reform-process in German PSM, the best financed in Europe, that aims to reduce high labour costs while at the same time fostering innovative programmes for youth. In a setting where right-wing populism wants to abolish PSM, politicians depend on impulses from within civil society to build a constructive framework for PSM reforms. Activists who build networks and are part of formal organisations are likely to have more impact.

The normative approach obscures the reality of widespread public apathy, as evidenced by declining voter turnout across Europe. This trend is even more pronounced for complex governance issues. Consequently, strengthening participation in media governance on a broader basis is a substantial challenge. Moreover, debate about a crisis in public trust in media, often initiated by populist parties, conceals underlying complexities fuelled by the conflict between opaque media governance and public expectations (Jakubowicz 2010). In fact, levels of trust vary. In northern European countries with strong PSM systems, PSM ranks among the most highly trusted sources of mediated news. In Germany, a meta-analysis indicated that trust in media remained relatively stable (30-40 per cent) between 1990 and 2015 (Reinemann & Fawzi 2016). German public-service radio (77 per cent), television (71 per cent) and dailies (65 per cent) were the most trusted media sources, while the internet was the least-trusted (30 per cent) and social media was associated with fake news (Infatest 2017). In contrast,

in eastern European countries and countries with weak PSM systems (e.g. Spain), trust in PSM was low (Newman et al. 2016). The proposed challenger phenomenon with respect to participation in PSM has hence to acknowledge that activists' goals are related to a media system, may be small in numbers and need compelling reasoning to be heard publicly.

Another significant factor explaining the challenger phenomenon has been growth in public expectations. Recent protest movements have encouraged public participation to influence governance and to criticise the lack of institutional responsiveness (e.g. Schweigert et al. 2011). In networked societies, media governance must accommodate public expectations for transparency and participation and social diversity must be addressed sensitively (Horz 2016). Of course, the balance between participation and journalistic autonomy requires further consideration. Thus, the operationalisation of the user-as-citizen and proposed PSM challenger models need clarification, which the empirical project seeks to provide.

Operationalisation and methodology

Audience participation can involve various activities and modes (see Eilders 2011). Here we concentrate on non-institutionalised participation in digital, networked media to examine two questions:

1. What types of PSM challengers are active in Europe?
2. What is the scope of PSM challengers' activity and networking?

The focus is on PSM, because public service broadcasting is distinct from commercial media "by virtue of the functions it performs and [its] value" for society (Jakubowicz 2010: 13). Activism via social media (e.g. Facebook) is considered because it affords informal networking opportunities. The study examined PSM challengers' impact on public debate and PSM governance. Based on the theoretical grounding above the research addressed three dimensions:

1. Regulatory: activists demand reform of, or participation in, media governance (e.g. proposing audience councils or co-determination in broadcasting councils).
2. Content: users-as-citizens function as media watchdogs, scrutinise content quality and journalistic ethics, or initiate public dialogue with PSM.
3. Social: activists advocate public values, claim co-determination regarding public funding (e.g. licence-fee bodies) and respond to demographic changes (e.g. changing consumption habits).

I assume that PSM challengers use different channels (websites, interviews, social media, etc.) in efforts to influence public debate, and may question either the mode of PSM governance or the running of these public institutions. In countries with federal struc-

tures such as Germany, PSM challengers may have a subnational focus. The diverging contexts and institutional differences needs attention, but isn't the focus of this chapter.

The study frames PSM challenger activities on the basis of empirical research undertaken between April and July 2016. The study is predominantly based on desk research, observations and qualitative interviews, which are well-suited for identifying and understanding motivations and attitudes (Ritchie et al. 2003). The study is not intended to be representative, but rather to understand how interviewees interpret their activism related to PSM. Semi-structured interviews examined PSM-related activities (e.g. communication and mobilisation methods), opinions (e.g. regarding PSM institutions and financing structures), information-sharing (e.g. gathering and disseminating information), and biographical details (e.g. age, education, employment and political affiliation).

To identify PSM challengers and tackle the language barrier, scholars were approached via existing networks (e.g. the Euromedia Research Group and Global PSM-Experts Network). Feedback was received from scholars in Greece, Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain and Sweden. A sample of sixteen audience initiatives in seven European countries was selected according to significance and relevance to the research questions, and approached with interview requests. Most did not respond or were unwilling to be interviewed. The final sample consisted of five initiatives. Four interviews have been conducted: 'Teledetodos' in Spain, 'Infocivica' in Italy, 'Medienkritik' in Switzerland and 'Bürger/Publikumsmittbestimmung (öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk)' in Germany. Based on interviews and complementary research, a typology of audience activism is proposed based on an overview of PSM challengers' main objectives, methods and networks.¹

The activities of public service media challengers

We can now examine the findings from the study, presented as three dominant aspects: 1) representing general audience interests, 2) safeguarding the future of PSM, and 3) boycotting PSM institutions or financing schemes. These aspects may be connected; ensuring an independent, high-quality PSM institution is for example about safeguarding the future of PSM, while complementing the user-as-citizen concept is about representing general audience interests. Some PSM challengers advocated specific interests such as traditional family or religious values that were beyond the scope of this study. In the analysis that follows, I look at the three aspects in three dimensions: political, social and content.

Representing general audience interests

There are activist groups in various European countries advocating the political interests of PSM audiences and users. Initiatives with well-defined goals are mostly

organised by activists with a personal and professional interest in PSM that aim to affect change on behalf of audiences.

The British ‘Voice of the Listener and Viewer’ (VLV) is the most prominent European group representing general audience interests. Founded in 1983 by Jocelyn Hay, VLV is influential in advocating for an independent BBC. In 2015, VLV demanded the formation of an independent body for the licence fee after audiences were excluded from discussions about reforming the BBC’s financing scheme (VLV 2015).²

Several informal initiatives have spontaneously organised in Germany using Facebook. ‘Bürger/Publikumsmitbestimmung (öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk)’ (‘Citizen/Public Participation Public-Service Broadcasting’) was founded in 2014 and has one editor and about 200 members (2016). The editor, Jurgen Valjent, assumes in a telephone interview an “enormous interdependency of PSM and politics”, and promotes institutional audience participation because politicians are members of broadcasting councils but also legislate federal broadcasting laws, creating potential conflicts of interest. Such informal initiatives work to enlist and retain members via networking on Facebook. But members’ motivations can vary widely, leading to ideological tensions and fragmentation within the group over the necessity and degrees of reform for PSM in a digital environment.

In Spain, ‘Teledetodos’ advocates public service media as a civic right in a democratic society, demanding independence in regulation and high content quality. The public service model in southern Europe was characterised by Hallin and Mancini as ‘polarized pluralist systems’ due to strong state intervention, “parliamentary or government model of broadcasting”, and high political parallelism (2004: 67). Spain’s RTVE is state-owned with ‘special autonomy’. Until 2006, the selection process for members of its governing body rested solely with government. Since 2006, the Parliament elects board members (eight by Congress and four by Senate) for twelve year periods (Medina & Ojer 2010). This still represents a rather high degree of political dependence that is questioned by ‘Teledetodos’, which has about 140 members with 10-20 that are active, depending on the topic (telephone interview with Rafael Diaz).

‘Infocivica’ was established in 2000 in Italy by journalists, scholars and media experts with similar goals. It lost active members until being re-established in 2016 with an agenda that focused on developing a public service internet.³ Declines in membership and low activity are common problems. Even well-informed groups only manage to get a few involved and voluntarism has problems with sustainability. Policy analysis based on action theory explains political engagement as social action in conflicted areas that involve both individual values, interests and preferences, and the political sticking power of formal structures of a political system and economic orientations (Then & Kehl 2012). The individual factor plays a major role in coping with and transforming personal conflicts to produce sustainable and constructive engagement.

It is difficult to reach a broader public sphere to impact media policy. Those who network in active, well organised groups tend to be the most effective. Despite compli-

cations, ‘Teledetodos’ and ‘Infocivica’ have co-published open letters on their websites, aimed at policymakers and governments. Both groups view audience participation as essential to public value, democratisation and the future relevance of PSM. Trans-national networks are supported by co-published texts and co-organised seminars, like the one these groups organised in Rome on 19 September 2016, which proposed a new European PSM model. This aim exceeds the goal of representing audiences to prioritise systemic issues that are necessary for safeguarding PSM on a European scale. Also, it illustrates the interconnectedness of concrete demands for protecting audience interests and achieving systemic reform.

It is too early to know their impact, but such groups have developed effective political support networks. ‘Teledetodos’ has drafted media policies for Podemos (a Spanish left-wing political party), while the German Initiative für einen Publikumsrat für öffentlich-rechtliche Medien (short: Publikumsrat) has been involved in governmental dialogues in Germany (Deutscher Bundestag – Ausschuss für Kultur und Medien 2017) and initiated public debate about the regulatory dimension of audience participation in PSM since 2013.⁴

Perhaps one of the most important benefit is growing media literacy among audiences. The editor of ‘Bürger/Publikumsmitbestimmung (öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk)’ assumes audiences “learn” how journalism and media institutions work through participation. But who gets to be involved and thereby ‘learn’ is an issue. While German legislation guarantees user representation in broadcasting councils (Rundfunk- und Fernsehräte), their composition reflects institutionalised “socially relevant groups” (e.g. political parties, churches or trade unions) rather than general audiences. The participation of ‘ordinary people’ is needed to safeguard the legitimacy of PSM in the future. Despite a recent reform, German broadcasting councils still often appear arrogant, distant, and intransparent, inadequately reflecting societal changes and representing social diversity (Kleinstauber 2011, Horz 2017). Well-informed groups can bridge the gap between PSM institutions and audiences to facilitate an open PSM system (Wolf 2015: 24), although they frequently struggle to build large enough groups and socially diverse memberships.

Some groups are especially focused on content issues. In Germany, ‘Berliner Initiativkreis öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk’ (‘Berlin Initiative Committee for Public Service Broadcasting’, BIKÖR) and ‘Initiativkreis zur Förderung des öffentlichen Rundfunks Köln’ (‘Initiative Committee for the Promotion of Public Broadcasting Cologne’, IÖR) regularly collaborate. Both groups focus on programme quality and journalistic ethics. Their activities range from statements published on homepages, to convening conferences and publishing academic books.⁵ Due to the professional expertise of its members, IÖR is networked with media institutions, policy makers and scholars. PSM challengers represent audience interests by questioning potential violations of content standards and any lack of accountability in news reporting.

In Germany, audience watchdogs revealed several failures of PSM in reporting on the 2014 Ukraine crisis. In a leaked statement, the institutional programme council

of ARD (ARD-Programmbeirat 2014) confirmed an alleged bias. A detailed analysis of German PSM coverage of the Greek economic crisis also confirmed problems in bias (Otto et al. 2016). In Spain, the ‘Consejo de informativos’ was established by law in 2006 to ensure editorial independence. They found RTVE reporting on the recent Spanish election had been manipulated, which had been denounced by Teledetodos (Infolibre.es 2016). Such groups aim to foster the journalistic ethic of non-biased reporting and the public value of content diversity. Such democratic values are often at the heart of demands for audience participation in media governance.

Regarding the social dimension, some PSM challengers have demanded changes in public financing schemes. In Spain, RTVE is largely financed by taxes on commercial media. Rafael Diaz at ‘Teledetodos’ believes this creates a degree of dependency that undermines RTVE’s social mandate. In contrast, financial transparency in PSM systems that are financed by fees is seen as a way to ensure the representation of audience interests (Schoch 2017). Germany’s ARD and ZDF have established internal discussion groups to improve financial transparency, participation and remit for society to address demands from the prime ministers of the Federal States (*Länder*).

PSM challengers have argued that PSM has a responsibility to deliver content that reflects major demographic and technological developments that affect consumption habits, especially among young people. Some PSM challengers demand participation in content production, arguing that audiences should have a third-party right to broadcast for language or religious minorities. In Germany, legislation allows official religious groups (*Körperschaften*) to broadcast content and maintain editorial offices within PSM institutions. Italy’s ‘Infocivica’ rejects this model, arguing that trials of independently produced content (*autogestiti*) have failed because audiences felt manipulated by biased information. For PSM challengers, content *and* representation of social diversity are equally important, but must not undermine journalistic ethics or democratic values.

Safeguarding the future of public service media

Many scholars agree that PSM needs to renew its democratic role in a networked society context (e.g. Iosifidis 2010; Jakubowicz 2010). Activists perceive a gap between an urgent need for action and policymakers’ hesitancy to initiate reforms. In Germany, ‘Publikumsrat’ calls for more audience participation in PSM, a reflection of academic calls to treat audiences as serious PSM partners and embrace a bottom-up approach (Krotz 1996; Weichert 2005; Horz & Schiffler 2014). A 2014 Federal Constitutional Court decision confirmed the legitimacy of this demand in reprimanding ZDF for the composition of its broadcasting council. The court called for less politicians, more diversification, and higher dynamism in representation on the council to keep pace with social change. This decision created momentum for a broader debate about the regulatory dimension of citizen participation in the future of PSM in Germany.

Well-informed groups argue that PSM should be regulated by independent bodies to strengthen their position against commercial competitors. Government regulators, they suggest, typically reflect institutionalised interests, address users as consumers and fail to represent minority interests. This is evident in Spain where the government's competition regulator (Comisión Nacional de los Mercados y la Competencia) regulates RTVE, and in Italy where the government directly appoints the PSM council (Consiglio Nazionale dei Consumatori e degli Utenti). In Italy, the broadcasting system has a dualistic structure with RAI representing the public sector and Mediaset the commercial sector. State influence is traditionally high. The government of Romani Prodi tried to reduce political influence in media regulation, but the legislation failed (Padovani 2010).

Moving to the social dimension, many groups are concerned with the definition of public value. In Germany, IÖR is comprised of former staff of the regional-broadcaster WDR, members of WDR's broadcasting council, journalists and academics. The latest publication in a series of books they have published investigates PSM's public values and social mandate (Kops 2012). IÖR organises meetings and expert discussions. IÖR is a largely regional phenomenon due to the federal PSM structure in Germany, but does network with BIKÖR that is based in Berlin and mainly comprised of journalists.

BIKÖR especially campaigns to safeguard high journalistic ethics and content quality in PSM. In August 2016, the group published an open letter, 'Wege aus der Vertrauenskrise' ('Ways out of the confidence crisis'), suggesting that public trust in journalism was declining due to 'swarm journalism'. It proposed strengthening media transparency, promoting sensitivity to mistakes and criticised the embedding of PSM content in social media platforms. The latter is unrealistic in a networked society, however. Rather, the main challenge concerns safeguarding journalistic ethics and content quality across *all* platforms.

Boycotting public service media institutions and financing schemes

PSM challengers can also act as political pressure groups. Some have used changes in PSM financing schemes to focus public attention on the social dimension of media governance through boycotts. In Germany, a change in PSM financing from a device-related fee to a household levy aimed at tackling the free-rider problem. However, the new flat-rate, universal fee ignored variation in consumption and reduced exceptions for non-viewers, students, low-income earners and people with disabilities. Several boycott initiatives with various agendas were formed by activists to campaign against the 'compulsory levy' (*Zwangsgebühr*).

Boycotts are often motivated by perceptions that PSM supports rather than questions political power, and views public financing schemes as an unjustifiable tax. In Germany, 'Online Boykott' was formed in 2011 by a blogger actively posting news about prosecutions against the fees. Two other groups, 'Remote Control' and 'Initiative Mediennutzung ohne Zwangsgebühren' ('Initiative for media use without the compulsory levy'), were formed after the introduction of the household fee 2013. 'Online

Boykott' (2016) perceives PSM as but one media channel in a pluralistic system and demands a social return on public funding. With over 100,000 supporters, it is self-described as the "biggest platform in Germany that deals with the financing of PSM".

According to its own account, 'Remote Control' has organised over 6,000 people to withhold over €2.5 million Euros (Zahlungsstreik.net 2016). Compared to other boycotters, 'Remote Control' is an initiative of critical media users and addresses the social dimension of PSM governance, contributing constructively to an informed public debate: "We suspend our payments in order to negotiate how our fees are spent. We demand a socially-agreeable calculation of the amount. We demand political and economic transparency. Public-service broadcasting has to be as plural as its users" (Remote Control 2013; author's translation). 'Remote Control' members view existing PSM councils as dominated by politicians who focus too much on viewing figures, making PSM indistinguishable from commercial media. They believe PSM is inaccessible, undemocratic, hostile to fine arts and antisocial, and therefore demand a decentralised PSM model (Zahlungsstreik.net 2016).

Online petitions play an increasingly significant role in such boycotts. 'Initiative Mediennutzung ohne Zwangsgebühren' (2016) launched an open petition in 2014 and claims to have over 12,000 signatures. Another activist, 'Luigi C', launched an online petition in December 2013 that gathered over 531,000 signatures, although whether 'Luigi C.' is a concerned user or a market competitor is unclear (Luigi C. 2013). This illustrates how difficult it may be to separate political and audience interests in defining challenger motivations and actions. In Germany, online boycott petitions have gathered a combined 800,000 to 1 million signatures. In Switzerland, 'NoBillag', established by right-wing activists in 2014 in opposition to a household fee, garnered over 100,000 signatures and successfully provoked a public opinion poll (NoBillag 2016). On March 4th, 2018, however, a majority of over 71 per cent of the Swiss decided pro licence fees and PSM. Even the Swiss SRG – with its highly responsive structure as a registered association with about 15,000 members in the German-speaking part, organised in public clubs (Publikumsvereine) – was threatened to be abolished. Several Facebook pages are proving less successful. In 2016, the Norwegian 'Nei til NRK-lisens' ('No to NRK licence fees'), established in January 2011, had only about 5,000 likes and the German 'Alle gegen Beitragsservice' ('All against the service fee') had about 13,000 members.

Online activism aims to develop networks between like-minded people and gain public exposure. Overall, the spontaneous 'clicktivism' of online petitions seems more successful in gaining public attention than building online networks or constructive communities. Carpentier (2011) has criticised the pseudo-participation of social networks that demand little to no sustained involvement while superficially suggesting users are engaged in a socially important act. Furthermore, the reliability of statistics on, and the impetus behind, these initiatives are often questionable. Further research is necessary to identify the organisers and social networks involved.

At least some PSM boycotts seem to appeal to neoliberal and right-wing groups. The Prometheus Institute, a neoliberal think-tank affiliated with the German FDP (a

classical liberal political party), established Zwangsbeitrag.info in 2015. This website presents an image that mimics the anti-nuclear power sticker which became synonymous with the anti-nuclear grassroots movement in Germany in the 1980s with the caption “Zwangsbeitrag? Nein Danke” (‘Compulsory levy? No thanks’). This campaign is an exercise in strategic communication, so called ‘astroturfing’, which aims to corrupt civil protest for self-interested goals.⁶ At the time of writing, the campaign had gathered over 8,000 signatures.

Right-wing populist political parties and movements have used similar campaign methods to argue that PSM should be abolished, or not publicly financed. The Schweizerische Volkspartei (Swiss People’s Party) launched ‘Medienfreiheit’ (‘Media freedom’) in 2014, a cross-party network that employs democratic principles to lobby against SRG and public financing of PSM (Medienfreiheit 2016). Since 2015, the populist right-wing party Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany), has campaigned for PSM public financing to be ‘switched-off’. The Swedish Facebook group ‘Stoppa vänstervridningen inom SVT/SR’ (‘Stop the left-wing orientation at SVT/SR’), launched in 2015 and with about 500 supporters, argues that PSM has a structural left-wing bias. These groups fear independent media, which explains their hostility (Perloff 2015). It needs further research to analyse how far left-wing South European populism uses similar strategies.

Thus, two aspects of civil society participation are normatively problematic. First, political lobbyists and right-wing groups disguise lobbying as civil society action by adopting typical civil society methods or demands (e.g. organising petitions or demanding plebiscites on media governance), but with the aim of undermining rather than strengthen public service media. The social dimension needs to be extended to an anti-social dimension of activism. Second, lobby groups exploit civil society’s ‘problem sensitivity’, and use issues and communication channels to weaken civil society, media pluralism and public debate. These factors can undermine partnerships between PSM institutions and audiences. As demonstrated in a report from the German Ministry of Finance’s scientific council (Bundesfinanzministerium 2014), the idea of a reduced or abolished PSM has gained popularity in recent years, increasingly blurring the boundaries between left and right, civil society and ideologies, making analysis more complicated.

Discussion

This chapter provided an overview of PSM challengers, which is a highly relevant phenomenon based on the development of networked communications. The results presented make no claim of generalisability, but point at a set of social issues and practices with many unsolved questions that are pertinent to the viability and roles of PSM in a networked society. The study reveals two main types of highly-active networking groups in between the three thematic issues described above.

First, ‘well-informed groups’ that consist of people with professional and personal interests in PSM (e.g. scholars and journalists). These groups aim to change audience self-perceptions, counter hegemony, and influence media governance by enunciating concrete recommendations, promoting informed public debate and utilising “self-centred mass-communication” (Castells 2005). They are active in the regulatory and content dimensions oriented towards representing audience interests and safeguarding PSM (see Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of findings

PSM challengers’ dimensions	Main objectives	Examples
Regulatory	Audience interests Safeguarding PSM	Transparency and accountability of and participation in media governance Participation of ‘ordinary people’ in media governance Demand for independent regulators Participation in regulation and councils as necessary step to safeguard legitimacy of PSM
Content	Audience interests Safeguarding PSM	Criticise violation of content standards Demand unbiased reporting and reflect social diversity (e.g. third-party rights to broadcast) Demand program participation of users Journalistic ethics and content standards
Social	Audience interests	Demand financial transparency Fair and socially accepted broadcasting fees Transparency of funding Public value
‘Anti-social’	Boycotting Lobby group interest Political interest	Reject PSM fees or PSM altogether Boycott as means to claim fair and socially accepted broadcasting fees Astroturfing Pick up consumer interest for own political goals

The insularity of well-informed groups limits their impact on media governance. Some groups focusing on audience interests specifically target PSM institutions, in contrast with others who target the system of public service media as such. In Spain, this differentiation is ambiguous because there is only one PSM provider. It is not easy to separate the (often intertwined) goals of representing audience interests and safeguarding PSM as an institution.

Second, there is a problem with groups that use PSM as a field for political campaigning, mostly in the consumer-oriented social dimension. Enrique Bustamante,

head of 'Teledetodos', stated that PSM is fundamental to democratic societies, facilitating economic and political debates (Bustamante 2016). However, the limited institutionalisation of media criticism in mass media and the public sphere creates a vacuum of deliberation. Well-organised groups are particularly suited to exploit this potential for mediated influence, as visibility and impact increases with the level of organisation.

To make things more complex, this space is also occupied by small civil society groups, individual activists and ideological interests (e.g. extreme political parties). The recent success of right-wing populism and manipulation of news coverage across Europe suggests that (a minority of) users distrust mass media and view PSM as 'liars' steered by established interests. Differentiated and longitudinal studies contradict the standard view that trust in mass media is declining. In Germany, recent surveys have shown that trust in media is issue and medium dependent (Zapp/Infratest 2016), with PSM more trusted than print or internet-based media (WDR/Infratest 2016). Initiatives like 'Teledetodos' or 'Infocivica' that have complementary objectives can build collaborative national and transnational networks, which are interconnected with various governmental, EU or PSM institutions.

As for the second group, while most PSM challengers bridge the gap between PSM institutions and audiences, some undermine PSM legitimacy and deepen the gap between PSM and audiences. As boycotters show, it is not always clear whether PSM challengers promote audience, economic or political interests. These groups contort public debate and may discredit media critique as such. In this respect, the extent of networks between users, ideological interests and political parties is a pressing research question.

The task of PSM advocates remains focused on encouraging wider audience participation for improved media governance by engaging a shared culture of PSM responsibility. As long as PSM governance remains opaque, partnerships remain ambiguous and users continue to be treated as consumers, audience participation in PSM governance will be ineffective (Lowe 2008b). Further research is needed to understand the extent to which networking can enhance the impact of well-informed groups, and the degrees to which networking undermines PSM.

Notes

1. One item on the agenda, the media watchdog, was abandoned due to lack of empirical data.
2. For more about VLV, see Herzog & Zetti (2016).
3. See: http://www.infocivica.it/infocivica.eu/chi-siamo_presentazione.htm (accessed 10 July 2016) and <http://teledetodos.es/index.php/blogs/item/1151-declaracion-de-refundacion-de-infocivica-dichiarazione-rifondativa-di-infocivica> (accessed 12 September 2017).
4. 'Publikumsrat' will not be scrutinised to avoid potential conflict of interest (I am a founding member).
5. See: <http://www.berlinkreisrund.de/index.htm> and <http://www.ioer.org/> (both accessed 20 August 2016).
6. Astroturf, a brand of artificial grass, describes institutional campaigns that mimic grassroots movements.

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Convergence and Participation in Children's Television

The Case of Flemish Public Service Television

Alexander Dhoest & Marleen te Walvaart

Abstract

Flemish public television is increasingly conceived as a convergent, cross-media enterprise, as most clearly exemplified by Ketnet – VRT's cross-media brand and platform for children. Drawing on theories about convergence and participation as key characteristics of the networked society, this chapter empirically investigates the production of children's television by analysing Ketnet's online and cross-media presence. First, the chapter draws on qualitative content analysis to chart how Ketnet combines programmes and digital content. Second, in-depth interviews with producers explore the rationale behind this and its participatory potential. Our findings indicate that Ketnet is strongly convergent because television and online content are closely aligned, despite organisational and financial restrictions. Ketnet is also highly participatory, but not in the maximalist sense of sharing editorial power and control with children. There are ample opportunities for interaction and some for co-creation, but professionals keep tight control over the production process, which cautions against celebratory accounts of a radical shift in power in convergent media culture.

Keywords: VRT, Ketnet, cross-media, production studies, qualitative content analysis, editorial power

Introduction

Any study of contemporary television must deal with a discourse that suggests a condition of radical, irrevocable change. The future of media is commonly held to be uncertain due to digitisation and ensuing changes in the production, dissemination and consumption of 'content' beyond traditional broadcast programmes. Convergence is a key term to designate the networked entanglements between television and a range of digital media platforms, especially websites, social media and mobile apps. The lowering of historic barriers between production and consumption is supposed to facilitate easier and greater audience participation. On the basis of empirical research, we explore how issues of convergence and participation, key characteristics of the networked society, play out in the production of public television.

This chapter focuses on mechanisms and contexts that facilitate the convergence of television and digital content production, with specific interest in opportunities for audience engagement and participation that are created in the process. We report findings from a case study in ‘cultural production studies’ that emphasise the importance of context and micro-level analysis to understand production cultures (Havens & Lotz 2012). Three key contexts are reflected upon: first, the national (in our case the Flemish media landscape as an important regional market in Belgium); second, the institutional context of public service broadcasting (PSB); and third, the generic and audience context of children’s television broadly construed.

The case we analyse is Ketnet, a children’s TV channel operated by Flemish public broadcaster VRT. Established in 1997, in the reorganisation of VRT and continually modernised since, Ketnet is today a multiplatform brand with a strong online presence targeted to serve children up to twelve years of age (see www.ketnet.be). Ketnet offers a rich case because the channel is supported by a range of digital media and is particularly interactive compared to the majority of Flemish television channels. Moreover, in the broader literature on digitisation and convergence, children and adolescents are considered a key demographic as an age group oriented towards innovation and as a cohort who grew up with digital media (Livingstone 2008; Mittell 2011; Steemers 2016a). We exercise caution, however, to avoid reproducing an uncritical celebratory popular account of children as digital natives embracing all technological innovations. The focus on children’s TV should be welcome because, as Steemers (2016b) notes, there is a lack of production studies about children’s content outside the US and other English-speaking territories. The research reported here will help to fill this gap.

Our central research question is: In the networked society, how and why does Flemish public television address children on convergent platforms and create opportunities for audience participation? To answer the question, we use two methods: 1) qualitative content analysis to chart how these channels combine programmes and multiplatform digital content and applications, and 2) in-depth interviews with producers to explore why certain choices are made (i.e. the production logic and characteristic practices). Based on insights gained through the analysis of the case, the discussion and conclusions reflect more broadly on the role of public service media in a networked society.

Convergence and participation in networked societies

As influentially discussed by Manuel Castells (1996), transformations in recent decades have produced what he characterises as the ‘network society’ in which social structures are facilitated by new technological affordances. Media occupy a central position in his conception because the network is highly mediated. Also important is the work of Henry Jenkins on media convergence as a key driver, which is enabled by digitalisation and facilitates interactivity. Jenkins (2006: 2) highlighted the need

to understand “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want”. A first consequence is that research on convergence in TV necessitates the inclusion of all platforms where TV(-related) content is made available (Bennett 2011). A second consequence is that convergence not only refers to technological changes but, importantly, to changing cultures of media production and reception (Kackman et al. 2011). In our study, we therefore include all platforms and focus on production culture. Audience research falls beyond the scope of the research reported here.

In Jenkins's treatment (2006), convergence culture is closely tied to commercial companies and goals. It is clear by now that the ramifications are much broader. The current convergent and participatory media culture is equally pertinent to and for PSB, and offers opportunities of particular importance in the development of public service media (PSM) that goes beyond, but does not exclude, radio and television broadcasting. As Iosifidis (2011) argues, PSM is capable of contributing to the creation of a more inclusive public sphere, even more so than the internet in general, because it operates (ideally) outside the context of commercial pressure. Van Dijck and Poell (2015) add the important point that although social media have the potential to engage users, they pose significant challenges due to increasing commercial exploitation as data-driven platforms. They further observe that PSB organisations were quick to embrace the potential of audience engagement offered by Web 2.0 platforms, but increasingly feel the need to develop guidelines to safeguard public service values. By focusing on a pertinent PSM case, we can usefully explore the importance and challenges of convergence and audience participation in the public service context.

From a production perspective, convergence implies transmedia storytelling (Jenkins 2006), stories that unfold across different platforms. This should not be confused with cross-media productions that are developed for one medium and then expanded and cross-promoted in other media (Evans 2011). Transmedia narratives presuppose an active audience chasing down bits of fragmented but connected storyline across media channels (Jenkins 2006). As a consequence, convergence implies a renegotiation of the relationship between producers and consumers as an engaged audience takes up a more central position (Murdock 2010). Networked media are of central importance here.

From an audience perspective, networked culture encourages media to become ‘spreadable’ as audiences actively shape, share, reframe and remix content to satisfy their respective interests (Jenkins, Ford & Green 2013). Social media enable networked links between producers and consumers even for traditional broadcasting, “braiding the conversational and creative strengths of networked platforms with the mass entertainment and audience engagement abilities of broadcast networks” (van Dijck & Poell 2015: 148). Clearly, the convergent production process allows for increased audience interactivity and participation. But clarification of ‘participation’ is especially needed (Hayward 2013). The perspective advocated by Fish (2013: 374) is useful in

defining participation as amateurs engaging with closed sociotechnical systems, “in fields otherwise dominated by gatekeepers or professionals”. Carpentier and De Cleen (2008) further distinguish between minimalist forms of participation, where audiences have limited degrees of control, and maximalist forms of participation where audiences gain increasing control – potentially to the point where they gain equal power with professional television producers.

A broad definition considers low levels of audience engagement as a minimal form of participation, but some scholars prefer to use others terms. Vanhaeght and Donders (2016) distinguish between ‘interaction’, ‘co-creation’ and ‘participation’. They define ‘interaction’ as an active social-communicative relationship between broadcasters and publics, or between members of the public, as evident for instance in processes of selecting and sharing content, online voting and commenting. As observed by Carpentier (2012), while interacting the audience does not necessarily co-decide about content and such participation does not alter power relations. ‘Co-creation’ takes participation one step further because people contribute to the creation of content, for instance by uploading photos or videos. Again, however, this is not ‘participation’ in the maximalist sense, which implies a power shift through the structural involvement of non-professionals in processes of content development, decision making and production.

Early studies on convergent media tended to be optimistic about the potential for audience participation. Authors such as Rosen (2008), Deuze (2009) and Hartley (2009) expected corporate media industries to experience major disruption as audiences gained high degrees of control. Increasingly, however, empirical research underscore the contextual specificity of audience engagement in production. While audiences indeed have gained a more active and visible role, this has not generally been to a degree that has resulted in producers losing control (Domingo 2008; Teurlings 2012; van Es 2016). Our empirical research provides a useful exploration of the actual shift (or not) in power from producers to audiences in Belgium. This provides an interesting window for examining how ‘networked’ contemporary television actually is. To this purpose, we take into account degrees to which audience participation can occur, from minimalist to maximalist forms. In line with Moe, Poell and van Dijck (2016), we stress the importance of contexts, in particular national media culture and public versus commercial television.

The particularity of children as audiences in a convergent media context is the final element for theoretical contextualisation. More than any other group, children are perceived to be a vulnerable audience that must be protected from potential harm. Regulation strongly focuses on protection from the negative effects of commercialisation, sexual and violent content, and technological overload (Steemers 2016a). Against the alleged negative effects of media and presumed passivity induced by television consumption, children’s television has a tradition of seeking to activate its viewers, stimulating them to participate, engage and create (Christensen 2013). From its early years, public television was typically assigned the duty of educating, protecting and nurturing children. Domestic content was understood to play a key role in this en-

deavour by encouraging the development of healthy personal lives as well as national and cultural identities in contradiction to commercial culture (Steemers 2016a). From the 2000s, these preoccupations have been translated in the development to multi-platform digital channels or brands (Rutherford & Brown 2012; Steemers & D'Arma 2012) which, building on the heritage of participation, have taken advantage of the increased possibilities offered by digitisation. Taken together, this means convergence and participation are both of particular importance as a means for activating and involving young audiences, and limiting the potential for media-related harm to them. Therefore, producers negotiate the pressure to innovate with the obligation to protect, particularly in the PSM context.

Methods and context

As indicated, our main research question is: In the networked society, how and why does Flemish public television address children on convergent platforms and create opportunities for audience participation? We began research with qualitative content analysis to chart how Ketnet combines programmes and multiplatform digital content and applications. We wanted to learn how children's TV programmes are supported by cross-media extensions, and the degree to which and how children participate. To accomplish this, we reviewed Ketnet's programme schedule in the Spring season of 2016 and analysed one episode of all content produced by the channel as well as all online content. Using a topic list consisting of open-ended questions, all instances of convergence (e.g. cross-platform references) and participation (e.g. audience interaction, input and feedback) were extensively analysed. Rather than categorising each instance, our aim was to provide a finely grained analysis of each programme and site in all aspects, which led to some fifty pages of notes. In this chapter, we can only provide a synthetic overview.

In the next step, and most importantly, we explored why the choices are made. We wanted to analyse the production logic behind these platforms to gain insight into the motivations and considerations guiding decisions about Ketnet's digital presence, as well as the challenges and limitations that confront producers. We specifically examined why producers adopt certain digital extensions and how they use them, and their ideas about convergence and participation. To answer these questions, we used in-depth interviews, one of the methods frequently used in production studies to understand the motivations of producers (Bruun 2016).

As it is produced in a slightly different context, we will distinguish the news programme 'Karrewiet' (2002-) from the overarching Ketnet offer. We interviewed five key production collaborators: Ketnet channel manager Maarten Janssen, digital content manager Sam Ickx and editor Els van den Abeele; and 'Karrewiet' producer Bob Dierckx, and reporter and digital editor Marjon Willems.¹ In the analysis that follows, we consecutively discuss these cases, first addressing the convergent nature

of content and the participatory potential it creates, and then using the interviews to elucidate production logic and motivations.

Before starting with analysis, and in line with cultural production studies, it is important to briefly sketch the national and broadcasting context of our case. The case is located in Flanders, the northern Dutch-speaking community of Belgium, with a population of about 6.5 million. As a relatively prosperous but small region, the Flemish media landscape is dominated by VRT, the PSM organisation that is market leader in television – with a 39,3 per cent share in 2016 (CIM 2017). VRT is regulated by five-year government contracts that stress PSM's role in the digital cross-media landscape. The 2016–2020 contract (VRT 2015) specifies seven strategic goals, among which being “future oriented, digital and innovative” (p. 2) has a central position. Moreover, the aim is to provide content on a broader range of digital platforms, including social media (p. 27), and to stimulate audience participation and co-creation (p. 29).

VRT has specific responsibilities towards children. First, education is a core task that is oriented in particular to children (VRT 2015). More specifically, under the rubric of ‘media wisdom’, the current contract emphasises VRT's role in helping children deal with digital media, to guide them and interact with them (p. 20). To accomplish this, it must offer at least one brand oriented primary and multimedia service for children (p. 25). That is realised through Ketnet. As part of its duty to inform, VRT must also create information targeted for children, which is realised through the news programme ‘Karrewiet’. Clearly, VRT's duties in relation to children correspond to the historical and international framework sketched above, combining the call to innovate with the responsibility to protect. And as clearly, contract specifications recognise a unique role and range of responsibilities for PSM in the networked society context.

Ketnet

Ketnet is a flagship channel of Flemish PSM targeting young media users in a context of ever increasing commercial and international competition. With a share of 1,53 per cent of the total television market, it is the biggest children's channel and competes with a host of commercial channels: domestic channels including Studio100 TV (0,38 per cent market share), Kadet (0,35 per cent) and vtmKzoom (0,34 per cent), and international players including Nickelodeon (0,81 per cent), Nick Jr (0,63 per cent), Disney Channel (0,4 per cent), Cartoon Network (0,25 per cent) and Disney Junior (0,22 per cent) (CIM 2017).

In this fragmented and mostly commercial market, Ketnet aims to safeguard children from otherwise overwhelming commercial influences and offer them domestic content, which is less prominent on Flemish commercial channels and virtually absent from global channels. Beside a wide audience reach on television (49,6 per cent of all children in 2016), Ketnet has high website traffic (on average over 38,000 daily users)

who mainly watch video clips online – over 45 million in 2016 (VRT 2017). As a large player in the Flemish children's market, and part of a strong PSM presence in television and radio markets, Ketnet is not perceived as the underdog (as public children's channels often are) but closely monitored by commercial players who see the channel as an advantaged competitor with a guaranteed budget provided by the government. Public support for Ketnet is strong and it is perceived to be the safe and trustworthy non-commercial alternative in an increasingly commercialised landscape.

Ketnet is a multiplatform brand, offering users a 360-degree experience. Beside a well-stocked TV schedule containing a wealth of domestic programming, it has an elaborate website and two apps (the Ketnet app for users between 6 and 12, and the Ketnet Junior app for those under 6), as well as accounts on social media including Facebook and Instagram (mostly oriented towards parents, however, as only people over 13 years of age can – officially – register). Our content analysis shows that rather than operating separately, these media platforms continuously refer to each other. For instance, TV programmes are connected by so-called 'wrappers', young and dynamic Flemish presenters who announce programmes and feature in them. They frequently refer viewers to the Ketnet website, while also featuring material gathered through the website on the TV screen (such as pictures and videos that children uploaded). While most (professional) video content is produced for television and subsequently featured online (i.e. cross-media as defined above), the website also contains original content and narratives, such as a web show following the birth and growth of several animals ('Klein Gespuis' 2015-), a rare instance of transmedia storytelling. Beside original content, the website also contains an elaborate database of most programmes as well as games, contests and challenges, very much like the cases studied by Zanker (2011). Clearly, then, Ketnet acts as a convergent multimedia platform.

In the interviews, the producers confirm Ketnet's convergent production culture. Channel manager Janssen explains how the television and online members of the production team work closely together both in processes and in a shared office space: "We are one whole. We also share the same story." Ketnet digital content manager Ickx confirms this view: "We're all together in one bubble, so to say. We continuously work together in one process [...]. If we brainstorm, we do this together. In the daily editorial meeting we sit together." While the content of these platforms is closely co-ordinated, convergence has its limits because, as TV editor van den Abeele explains, online editors are not yet exchangeable with television editors because these jobs imply different technical skills.

As discussed above, convergence creates the possibility and expectation of audience participation – at least interaction and co-creation. Ketnet fulfils this expectation by allowing children to react online through their 'Ketnet profiles', a kind of social media profile which familiarises children with the principles of 'liking' and commenting, while protecting them by not allowing 'friending' or the exchange of personal information. This is a clear instance of interaction, as are the so-called 'wraps' between the TV programmes. Beside the direct viewer address that is typical of linear television,

these interludes between programmes not only refer to the website but also feature viewer input such as drawings, e-mails and online comments. However, the majority of the other shows tend to be more self-contained. While some do stimulate viewer activity, such as the quiz show 'KwisKwat' (2009-) where the presenter continuously encourages the audience to participate at home, or draw on audience input, such as 'Team Kwistenbiebel' (2010-) where children's questions are answered by a team of 'superspies', all examples of viewer engagement are limited to interaction.

Beside the Wraps, two shows offer more extensive opportunities for audience engagement. 'Ketnet Swipe' (2015-) is the extended Saturday version of the Wraps, spread through the day and including audience input of all kinds – drawings, letters, e-mails shown on television, as well as a screen in the studio displaying messages posted by children on the website. A few children literally participate by phone or in the studio, making it one of the few examples where interaction extends to a modest form of co-creation. 'Kingsize Live' (2011-) takes this one step further, both by involving a bigger group of children live in the studio and by inviting them to participate from home. Even more so than in 'Ketnet Swipe', children act as co-creators, for instance by posing questions to the special guests, both in the studio and from home. But even here, this does not extend to participation in the strict sense because producers make all key decisions and keep tight control of the production process.

Talking to the producers, the rationale for these participatory practices (broadly defined) becomes clear. As channel manager Janssen stresses, participation has always been part of the DNA of Ketnet and, as such, it is self-evident: "I think we do very few things in which no participation by children is possible." Asked why participation is so important, he stresses its connection to the core values of the channel: "We want to connect children, stimulate them. We want to engage in society, and that doesn't work if you only work in one direction. You can only do that if you let children participate." Clearly, the motivation for participation stems less from the growing technical possibilities and more from an older public service orientation that prioritises activating children and encouraging them to participate in the public sphere, a key characteristic of PSM (Iosifidis 2011).

Focusing in particular on participation through online and social media, Janssen also points out that their target audience forces them to follow new trends. Digital content manager Ickx confirms that their endeavour to create audience engagement is connected to the broader aim of safeguarding audiences in an increasingly competitive and commercial media ecology: "Of course you move towards a context in which children increasingly take control of their media use. The stronger you connect children to your offer, and the more you keep in touch with what they want to see and what triggers them, the stronger you are and the more important you become in their choices." This is very much in line with Steemers' observation that all PSB firms need to consider how to meet children's changing media consumption (2016a).

Reviewing the producers' responses, the strong focus on participation seems as much connected to pragmatic considerations such as keeping in touch with audiences

and keeping them engaged and viewing as to PSM values. Direct audience participation in programmes is restricted for similarly pragmatic reasons, as it necessitates careful planning. For instance, children participating in 'Kingsize Live' need elaborate instructions and rehearsal, as TV editor van den Abeele stresses: "Because if you suddenly put a micro under children's nose, you usually don't get anything. You have to prepare them well, so that has become a well-oiled machine." While sympathetic to the idea of children producing more content, van den Abeele stresses the importance of professional guidance: "You can never let them make something on their own; that is not going to be very enthralling". In a similar vein, Ickx stresses the importance of participation (broadly defined) while recognising that this does not lead to actual control over content production: "I think there's absolutely moments where we explore formats in which children themselves can creatively participate, but to say that children explicitly co-create content..." The television programme is always controlled by Ketnet professionals, which shows that more maximalist forms of participation, while commendable in theory, are hard to accomplish in practice.

Karrewiet

'Karrewiet' is Ketnet's news show. It is an interesting case because it operates in the same PSM context but is produced by a different editorial office that is situated in the VRT news department, which is known to operate as a separate entity inside VRT overall and has a strong identity. 'Karrewiet' consists of a short daily news show as well as a sub-page on the Ketnet website. Whereas Ketnet as a whole is strongly convergent in terms of the entanglement of TV and online content, our content analysis shows that 'Karrewiet' is first and foremost a TV programme with cross-media extensions on the website. The website primarily features clips from the TV show, while adding short written articles illustrated by pictures. In terms of participation (broadly defined), on the website children can like and comment on each clip and article through their Ketnet profiles and participate in polls. This input is rarely visibly featured in the news show on television, however. Therefore, audience participation in 'Karrewiet' is mostly limited to interaction. Children also frequently appear in the news show as subjects or vox pops in stories, but the news is made by professional producers so this does not constitute participation in the maximalist sense.

Talking to the 'Karrewiet' producers, it becomes clear they do aim to engage children in the news but work with a less convergent and participatory logic compared to the overarching Ketnet editorial team. Producer Dierckx explains how the news reports mostly come first, with a web editor subsequently uploading the stories on the website and adding articles and links, although occasionally they work the other way around: "For some topics, from the start we say: that's fun, we can... We should perhaps start by doing a call on the website, then we know the results on Monday and can use these results to film in a school, for instance, to confront them with the results."

Noting the centrality of the news show, Marjon Willems who works both as a TV reporter and a part time web editor for 'Karrewiet', thinks that 'Karrewiet's online presence should be strengthened. She says, "I think it goes a bit too slowly. I feel that there should be a 'Karrewiet' app by now." To her, the digital extensions follow the TV news too much, which is mostly due to time and budget constraints: "You're stuck in a routine and if you don't have a lot of time and budget, it's very difficult to get out of it and imagine new things." This is also a matter of personnel: Willems estimates that only one web editor per day works on the 'Karrewiet' site, while six or seven do so for the Ketnet site.

In terms of participation, producers for 'Karrewiet' even more than Ketnet use audience reactions on the website (liking, commenting, voting) as a form of feedback and to keep abreast of children's opinions and interests. Explaining the importance of audience input, Dierckx says: "It is important for us because it gives us an idea of what preoccupies children and in that sense, our website is good. [...] It often happens that we feel that a topic really lives, 'perhaps we should do something with it'. Or 'wow, there's a lot of reactions on that, that's something that interests a lot of children.'" Audience participation, then, acts as a form of audience research because it helps producers keep up with children's interests and select stories. Similarly, they get a lot of e-mail, particularly from schools, suggesting topics to explore in news reports: "Yes, these are all read and considered, and that leads to great reports. I think a lot of news reaches us that way. Because there are no special press agencies with children's news, so collecting them in this way is very important."

So, while the opportunities for audience input mostly qualify as interaction, one could argue they occasionally lead to a modest form of co-creation as children and schools (indirectly) contribute to the choice of news topics. Moreover, the website is also used to identify children who can act as reporters, a form of co-creation that increases viewer engagement but does not necessarily surrender editorial power and control. Editor Willems is sceptical about participation in the maximalist sense because she thinks the potential for audience participation is overestimated: "Children who jump out, for instance with a crazy opinion, are exceptions. The responses we get are often quite childish and super boring and you can't work with that material." Again, this underscores the need for professional guidance of children as participants.

Discussion and conclusion

Over the past several years, Ketnet has become a convergent platform with strongly connected television programmes and digital content that reflect an underlying structure of collaboration and forms a multiplatform brand, which is in line with international tendencies in children's television (Rutherford & Brown 2012; Steemers & D'Arma 2012). As such, Ketnet fulfils its PSM duties by offering content on digital platforms and helping to develop children's media wisdom. At the same time, our in-

interviews clearly show that higher-level policies are not top of mind for the producers, who mostly indicate pragmatic reasons for developing convergence as a way to stay in touch with young, volatile and media-savvy media users. Moreover, producers mention a number of practical obstacles explaining the slightly lower level of convergence for 'Karrewiet', which has a smaller web staff and prioritises television content. For 'Karrewiet', digital content mostly operates as cross-media extensions, while Ketnet TV and online editors work more closely together, occasionally developing the transmedia content which is characteristic of networked convergence culture.

In terms of audience participation, Ketnet is strongly oriented towards its viewers and users, and consistently solicits their active participation and input. This has been part of the channel identity from the start, and builds upon a long tradition of activating and stimulating children in Flemish public broadcasting. In the digital media ecology, new opportunities were created such as interacting through social media and uploading photos and videos. However, while participation broadly defined is key to all of Ketnet's endeavours, it hardly ever qualifies as a shift in producer power. Most often, children's engagement can be qualified as interaction, responding to producers and other users while not participating in the production process. Occasionally, participation verges on co-creation, not in the egalitarian sense of contributing to the production process as equals but in terms of providing content (questions, pictures, etc.) and participating in the television show. None of this is participation in its more maximal form. As professionals explain, they feel a need to keep control over all occasions for audience engagement to guarantee good quality. This is very much in line with other critical and empirical research (Domingo 2008; Teurlings 2012; van Es 2016).

Our research results call into question celebratory accounts of increased audience participation that seem to go hand in hand with convergence in networked societies. The participatory potential of networked culture is not fully realised here, in line with growing insights in academic research including recent work from Jenkins (2014: 272) who has acknowledged "how many people are still excluded from even the most minimal opportunities for participation within networked culture". If decentralised production, outside of classical media companies, is one of the potentials in and for a networked society, this potential is not realised here: professional producers, embedded within the PSM institution, keep control. Compared to other VRT departments, Ketnet operates with a rather networked logic, creating connections between diverse platforms and its audience. But it gets nowhere near to the more radically decentralised logic of networked culture where non-professional consumers become producers.

The question remains, then, whether maximal participation is really the ideal scenario? The tendency in current literature on participation condemns efforts by professional media producers to keep control. Particularly for PSM, the dominant idea is that audiences should be engaged and involved in the public sphere through a significant degree of participation. The Ketnet case shows that more minimal forms of participation such as interaction and co-creation can be successful ways of integrating

audience input, stimulating participation in society but not necessarily in the media production process.

Of course, we must take into account the specificity of children's television: Due to their developmental stage in the lifecycle it makes sense to involve children to a limited extent in media production. In a context of digital and social media giving increasing power to non-professionals, a more classical (if increasingly networked) PSM institution may provide a safe haven, in fact, guaranteeing adherence to professional standards. This is arguably the case not only for children's television, but well beyond, as the initial excitement over the networked society increasingly gives way to concerns about commercial and political recuperations. Ketnet is a successful example and we would argue that although PSM needs to engage with the broader networked society, it can be of greatest service by offering a stable and trustworthy 'node' and maintaining professional standards that are rooted in the public service ethos.

Note

1. All interviews were transcribed verbatim; all quotes are translations from Dutch by the authors. We wish to thank the MA students of the 2015-2016 Audiovisual Media seminar at the University of Antwerp for their help in conducting and transcribing the interviews.

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Television programmes

- Karrewiet (2002-, Belgium: VRT)
- Ketnet Swipe (2015-, Belgium: VRT)
- Kingsize Live (2011-, Belgium: VRT)
- Klein Gespuis (2015-, Belgium: VRT) KwisKwat (2009-, Belgium: Studio 100 for VRT)
- Team Kwistenbiebel (2010-, Belgium: VRT)

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The eighth RIPE Reader critically examines the 'networked society' concept in relation to public service media. Although a popular construct in media policy, corporate strategy and academic discourse, the concept is vague and functions as a buzzword and catchphrase. This Reader clarifies and critiques the networked society notion with specific focus on enduring public interest values and performance in media. At issue is whether public service media will be a primary node for civil society services in the post-broadcasting era? Although networked communications offer significant benefits, they also present problems for universal access and service. An individual's freedom to tap into, activate, build or link with a network is not guaranteed and threats to net neutrality are resurgent. Networks are vulnerable to hacking and geo-blocking, and facilitate clandestine surveillance. This Reader prioritises the public interest in a networked society. The authors examine the role of public media organisations in the robust but often contradictory framework of networked communications. Our departure point is both sceptical and aspirational, both analytical and normative, both forward-looking and historically-grounded. While by no means the last word on the issues treated, this collection provides a timely starting point at least.

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